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ABSTRACT

The Annenberg Rural Challenge is a national effort to revitalize rural communities and schools and their long-standing values of community, democracy, and care for the natural environment. This collection of five essays presents a number of themes that are central to the Rural Challenge's philosophy. "Bringing It All Back Home: Reclaiming the Rural Story" (Mary Casey) talks about the stories that give definition to the diversity of rural American communities. This perspective provides a richer way to think about "rural" as a concept, not just a demographic category. "Democracy, Schools and Communities" (Carla Fontaine) explores democracy as a critical legacy of rural education. Reviving the idea that school and community are intertwined can be an inspiration for reconstructing a more local base for schools and rebuilding communities. "On Living Well in Our Place: Earlier Rural Reform Movements" (Julie G. Canniff) reviews efforts to revitalize rural schools and communities in the early 20th century, noting parallels with the Rural Challenge's efforts toward social, economic, and cultural revitalization of local communities and their reintegration with their schools. "The Genius of Place" (Ben Williams) provides a philosophical base to the concepts of place and community. Turning away from what is local and seeking progress in the far away can result in profound moral, spiritual, aesthetic and educational losses. "Reflections on Leonard Covello: Teacher with a Heart" (Vito Perrone) describes a teacher who brought a village conception to his urban school environment. The essays aim to suggest additional possibilities for the school-community exchange interests of the Rural Challenge. (Contains 163 references.) (TD)

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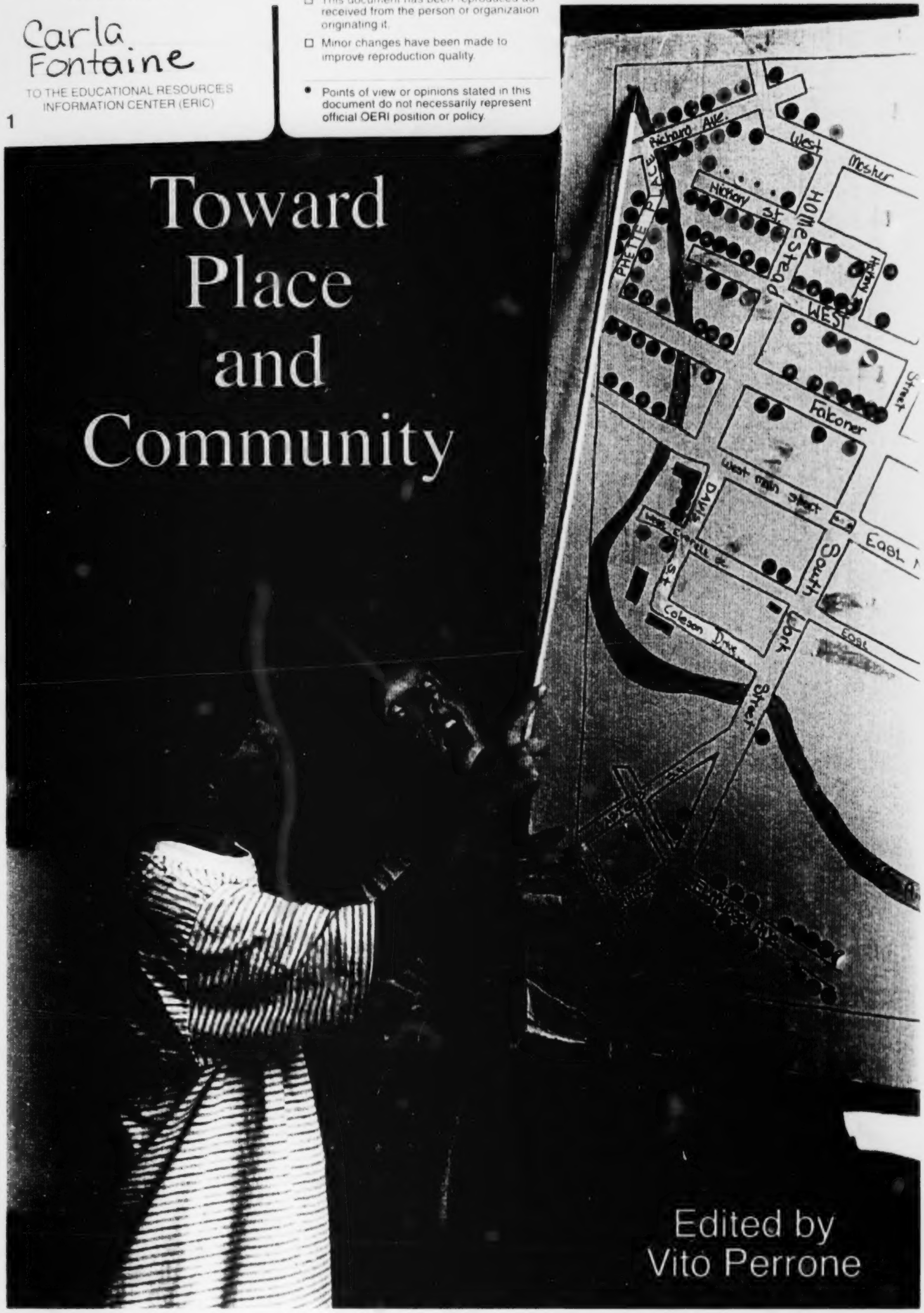
# Toward Place and Community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## Annenberg Rural Challenge

# *Toward Place and Community*

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# INTRODUCTION

The Rural Challenge represents a large national effort to transform rural schools and communities – though the principal entry point to date has been within schools. Among the dominant themes are that students should come to know their local communities well, seeing in the local circumstances a history of consequence and ongoing possibilities, understanding that real choices exist in adulthood, that conserving resources, values and cultures is important, and that communities and schools need to be seen more as one, not as separate entities.

Further, the Rural Challenge represents a challenge to the seventy-five year history of large-scale consolidation of schools. Such efforts have not produced, to any significant degree, greater efficiencies, lower costs or better education. Nearly a century of research shows that the standardization and bureaucratization of schools advanced by state agencies and various national professional education associations have not been particularly beneficial. The Rural Challenge is grounded in the belief that local communities need to be the principal centers for determining educational directions and that schools need to be attuned to local interests. Rural Challenge participants hope that this change in direction may stop the social, cultural and economic erosion caused by consolidations which have moved control further and further away, mostly to the bureaucracies of state governments and the large social, cultural and economic entities of our urban centers and national/international corporate structures. Against this history of erosion, the Rural Challenge points to the possibilities for reconstructing, revitalizing and reclaiming rural communities and their long-standing values of community, democracy and caring for the natural environment.

The foregoing ideas are clearly important but they are also in need of ongoing explication, making them more a part of the discourse of Rural Challenge communities and schools. To that end, it seemed that we might make a significant contribution to the work of the Rural Challenge by preparing a series of essays around a number of critical Rural Challenge themes and ideas. We intend the essays to be educational, another base for conversation at Rural Challenge gatherings and within Rural Challenge sites.

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**Mary Casey** provides an introduction to our concern for stories, those written and oral narratives which give definition to the diversity of rural communities that stretch across the American landscape. In offering such a perspective, she provides an historical account of rural life over several centuries, in the end providing a richer way to think about *rural* as a conception and not just a demographic category. She makes clear the diversity of our rural landscape, something often lost in attempts to generalize what is elsewhere, what is seen as *other*. She gives us another way to think about the Rural Challenge and the work it is promoting in schools and communities.

**Carla Fontaine** explores *democracy* as a critical legacy of rural education. She makes clear in her discussion of rural education historically that it always had a community base. Schools were *of* the community, not separate *from* the community. This is obviously not a new story but one that has been diminished in and out of rural communities. She describes the losses over time but keeps alive the idea that it is still not too late to reclaim some of that critical legacy and to use that legacy as inspiration for reconstructing a more local base for schools and the rebuilding of communities.

**Julie Canniff** reviews efforts to revitalize rural schools and communities in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, both here and in Canada. The reason for the historical review is to acknowledge that rural education/community reform has an important history that we can learn from. Many of the basic ideas are not so far removed from much that the Rural Challenge is promoting, especially in regard to the focus on what is local, the social, economic and cultural revitalization of local communities, the integration of school and community institutions and democracy. That such ideas were not universally supported in rural settings is worth thinking about.

**Ben Williams** offers a grounding in *place* and *community*. It is a good historical and cultural account of these critical concepts guiding the Rural Challenge. What should be particularly helpful to readers is the philosophical base that is provided alongside the practical possibilities. We learn that *place* and *community* are more than geographical conceptions and that they also have roots across cultures. What will be particularly clear is the understanding that by turning away from what is local, by always seeking the larger, seeing "progress" in the far away, the moral, spiritual, aesthetic and educational losses can be profound.

While the four essays described above are the principal elements, we have added a small piece of text from Vito Perrone's book, **Reflections on Leonard Covello: A Teacher with a Heart** (Teachers College Press, August, 1998). It is an urban story from the 1920s and 30s, but one in which the school to which Covello was attached was tied closely to the community. Covello brought a village conception to his urban environment. It is meant to suggest additional possibilities for the school-community exchange interests of the Rural Challenge.

Vito Perrone
Cambridge, Massachusetts
March, 1998

# BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME
## Reclaiming The Rural Story

**Mary Casey**

## A Rural Lesson

*Every story, when we were children, revealed a lesson.*

*Jane Smiley*

I remember the first night I spent in Shelby. I checked into a hotel on a Sunday evening around 6:30, or so. It was cool. So cool, in fact, that I had made the 40 minute trip from the airport in Charlotte without once turning on the air conditioner in the car — unusual conditions for North Carolina in mid-July. I needed to copy some materials for a presentation I was giving to a group of rural teachers the next day so I inquired at the front desk about where I might find a copier in town. The receptionist eyed me quizzically for a moment, handed me my room key and politely informed me that there were no copy places in town, and that even if there were they would not be open on a Sunday evening. He was kind enough, however, to give me the name of a local printer he thought might be able to help me in the morning. I then asked about finding a place to eat. Again, he told me that nothing was open just then but recommended a nice family-style restaurant I could try the next day. My next question, predictably, was to be, "Is there anything that *is* open on Sunday evenings?" Before I could pose it, however, the man leaned forward over the desk top, smiled and said simply: "Y'all not from around here, are you?" Clearly, it was a not a question.

For the next 30 minutes or so, I stood at the desk, my luggage still at my feet and the key to my room dangling in my hand as I listened to story after story about Shelby. The receptionist, it seems, was more than happy to share his wealth of local knowledge with me. He covered it all, from politics to agriculture, weather to religion, local history to local family gossip. I learned that Shelby is the county seat and that cotton has regained its status as the ruling cash crop of the area; I heard about how no one misses the annual county fair, and about how most people in Shelby had lived there all of their lives. Even the weather conditions seem to be perfect with "just the right amount of sun and snow to

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keep everyone happy." There was no mistaking the pride in his voice when he told me that Shelby is just a "real nice place to live — safe, friendly, caring — a good Christian town."

Nestled just beyond the foothills region of the Blue Ridge Mountains, I was surprised to learn that Shelby was a critical site in the final stages of the Revolutionary War. By now, this hotel receptionist-turned-history teacher was well aware that he had a captive audience so he insisted that I make time to visit historic downtown and to be sure to walk through the old county courthouse —" built just like the State House in Raleigh, only a lot smaller, of course." "Shelby," he said, "may be a short stop on a road map but it has a long history." As he spoke, I became aware that he was teaching me an important lesson, not just in the ways of rural life in Shelby, but in ways of seeing that go beyond looking — that *explore*, rather than simply *observe* the unfamiliar. Listening to his stories I was reminded of how easy it is to look without ever really seeing what may be right in front of us.

The fact is, what we are able to see depends, in part, on what we want to know and what we think is *worth* knowing about a place. To those who seldom venture into rural terrain, Shelby might appear to be no more than a rest stop or a crossroads that you pass through on your way to somewhere else. And yet, every place has its own story, its own unique social history colored by events in the lives of the people who live and love, hope and dream, labor and rest within its borders. These events are the stories of our living and our dying — the chronicling of our journeys in a particular place, in a particular time in history. For those of us who claim to be social historians, social science researchers, educators, and learners interested in understanding more deeply the human experience and the conditions that support ways of living that are sustaining and enduring, these are the stories and the lessons that matter.

Our task as members of the Annenberg Rural Challenge research and evaluation team is to document the work of a number of projects funded by the Rural Challenge to help revitalize rural schools and rural communities. Central to this work are the narratives of people who live in places that are very much like Shelby — "short stops on a road map" with long histories of rural traditions and ways of living. Unfortunately, these traditions are becoming harder and harder to find, even in these more rural areas of the United States.

The story of rural life in this country is one that has been neglected, too long overlooked or relegated to the past as if to suggest that there is no present rural reality worth telling. Over the last 50 years, or so, American attitudes toward rural areas of the country have shifted from pride and concern to indifference and ultimately neglect (Sher, 1977). It is by no means a coincidence that this shift in public attitudes occurred at the same time that the rural population was in the midst of a steady decline. By 1917, urban dwellers had outnumbered those living in rural areas for the first time in the history of the United States (Miller, 1993). At the start of World War II, this decline accelerated, leaving many rural areas struggling for their existence. The "lure of the city," its lights, its excitement, and its promise of work pulled hard on the hopes and dreams of many rural families who felt the conflict of choosing between a life they had long known and loved and economic survival (Degler, 1970).

In many ways, this same conflict is reflected in the eyes of the media which tends to portray rural areas in extremes, the images being either very positive or very negative.

We are as likely to see photos of remote places with breath-taking scenery as we are to see images of rural people struggling in poverty, neglect, and despair. Television, in particular, has contributed heavily to these conflicting and often highly distorted images of rural life. Shows such as "Green Acres," "Beverly Hillbillies," and "Mayberry" anchored images of country people in the minds of millions of viewers as either simple-minded or uneducated folk, while programs such as "The Waltons" tended to glorify and romanticize rural life as the American ideal.

The press also seems to favor extremes in its coverage of rural places. For the most part, newspapers and television news reports tend to paint a rather harsh picture of rural life. Last year, the Boston Globe ran a series of articles on life in rural Massachusetts that focused exclusively on the economic hardships experienced by many families in these communities. If the intent of these articles was to call attention to the plight of the rural poor, they could not have been more successful. The accounts were largely graphic portrayals of families struggling to survive in an environment rife with poverty, incest, illiteracy and alcoholism. These reports also seemed to support the claims of numerous studies that teen pregnancy and high school drop-out rates are growing in rural areas and that the incidence of violence at the hands of rural children and adolescents is increasing rapidly. Accounts such as these are a sobering counterpoint to the enticing images and interesting stories of rural areas often portrayed and told in magazines such as National Geographic and Country Life.

For sure, these problems do exist in rural areas. Yet, it can hardly be said that such conditions as described in the Boston Globe are indigenous to rural life. In fact, most of them are as much of a concern in many urban communities as they are in rural areas. The fact is, we have ignored rural communities for so long in this country that we do not have an accurate understanding of either their problems or their strengths. Moreover, such polarized perceptions of rural life are hardly beneficial to rural people or their communities. Arguably, such conflicting representations simply confound the problem of misperception and ignorance that underpins the lack of respect and adequate attention rural communities have received since the first half of this century.

There is no better example of the depth of our neglect than the long-standing tradition in this country of inadequate educational funding of rural schools (Nachtigal, 1982). Further support for this assertion is evinced by the dearth of information on rural students in the field of educational research. Compared to their urban counterparts, rural youth have historically been: 1) neglected in educational and developmental studies of adolescents and schools (Stern, 1994); and 2) viewed mainly from a deficit perspective, seen as having limited educational and economic resources, limited career opportunities, and low incentives for achievement (Haller & Virkler, 1992).

In her introduction to the report, *The Condition of Education in Rural Schools*, editor, Joyce Stern (1994), suggests that the time has come for the nation to focus its attention on Rural America which has, for years, given much of its resources — material goods as well as intellectual ideas - - to the development of urban centers all over the country. Stern argues that the agrarian tradition is responsible for far more than simply keeping Americans well nourished: "Rural America may be seen as providing one of the most important spiritual and ethical anchors for the nation" (p. 1). Stern also argues that with the continued growth of urban America the question about the vitality and long-term viability of rural life has won the attention of many local, state, federal and national education policy makers. In the last several years increasing numbers of interested teachers, students, parents, as well as researchers, community activists, and funders have joined this conversation. The result of this recent attention to rural areas can be seen in the growing numbers of new initiatives across the country that are aimed at studying, strengthening and sustaining rural communities. Among these initiatives is the Annenberg Rural Challenge.

The purpose of this paper is not simply to dispel all the negative images of rural America or replace them with positive ones. Many of the problems identified by the media, policy makers, researchers and educators are real and need to be addressed. Our concern is that these stories may convey, however implicitly, a perception of rural people and rural communities that is both unwarranted and inaccurate. A central aspect of the work of the Rural Challenge is to confront, expose and *challenge* the underlying assumptions that engender or continue to support such negative perceptions. The problems have been well-documented; our intent is to provide a more balanced, holistic and realistic perspective on the 25% of our nation's people who identify themselves as rural by intentionally seeking those stories that focus on what is genuinely *good* about rural communities. But first, we need to look carefully and critically at the existing stories and, perhaps more importantly, who is telling them.

## The Power of Story

> *Life and story are not two separate phenomena. They are part of the same fabric, in that life informs and is formed by stories.*
>
> *Guy Widdershoven*

The relation between life and story is concerned primarily with the relation between lived reality and the way in which the meaning of that life or reality is determined, understood, and communicated. The hermeneutic claim that life and story are internally related is based on the premise that the meaning of life is both explicated and created in life stories (Widdershoven, 1993). As we begin our work of listening for and documenting narratives of rural life, a question we must address is, how can we tell a story that will convey the essence of what we mean by rural when there is no one reality, no one definition, or no one story to tell? A partial answer, at least, might be that we focus first on what narratives already exist within rural communities as well as what form they take, what function they serve, and what meaning they hold for those who live in these communities.

We have chosen a narrative approach to our work as a research and evaluation team because we are interested in story as a way of understanding and documenting the meaning of rural life to those who live in rural areas. Storytelling is a central aspect of human experience. It is, in Eliot Mishler's (1986) words, "one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (pp 67-68). The act of telling one's story is as much social and political as is it personal; it is an inherently relational act that links past and present and connects us to ourselves as well as to our listeners within a particular cultural, temporal and relational context. We weave strands of our lives together in narratives that are meant not simply to communicate what we know but to *make sense* of what we know;

to help us understand our own actions and the actions of others (MacIntyre, 1981; Mishler, 1986).

From a research perspective, "story" is a unique kind of social history that is told both by those who are at its center and those who seek to record it for a larger purpose. The story we seek to tell is concerned not only with documenting the details of life in rural communities but also with capturing the diversity of their people. Clearly, there is no one rural story or one rural voice. The coastal villages of Maine are not the same as the backwater towns of Mississippi; the open regions of the great plains are vastly different from the dense forests of the Northeast Kingdom; and the soaring mountains of the Northwest are a far cry from the coal-packed mountains of Appalachia. And yet, many traditional forms of research and evaluation do not accommodate these differences.

A fundamental premise of most narrative approaches to research is that narrative privileges language and culture in the meaning-making process (Tappan & Packer, 1991). Thus, focusing on narratives allows the diversity in rural areas not only to be recognized, but to be preserved in and throughout the research process. Perhaps more importantly, narrative and storytelling allow diverse voices to speak with the authority of their own experiences, thereby, helping us to hear and to see more clearly what might be unique to each place.

Many of the existing stories from rural areas have been preserved and passed on through folk ways and oral traditions that are so much a part of the culture of rural life. Told in word and in song, they are rife with a wisdom born of generations of men, women and children whose lives were shaped by the lessons of the land that sustained them. Storytelling was an art form in many rural communities and served as both entertainment and as a way of keeping the history of a particular place. Song, particularly ballads and even dance were also popular forms of storytelling and were often used to record special events or happenings in the community. These creative expressions contain far more than the facts and details of a particular time period, place, or event. They constitute the cultural heritage of entire regions of rural America — their folk ways, their arts and their traditions (Clapp, 1939). As such, it is important for us to consider carefully what each of these traditions contributes to the larger narrative of rural life, both then and now.

To enter rural places through the work of their artists — to read their poetry, to sing their songs, to play their music, or to feel the rhythm of their dance *is* to tell their story. Here we join rural people at the threshold of their living where struggle and courage collide and creativity is born. These were the moments that made living life at the bone bearable (Sayers, 1974), and out of them grew a faith in themselves and a belief in their ability to survive.

In pursuing narratives of rural people and their communities we seek to communicate an account of rural life that contains both personal and cultural meaning as well as historical fact. A good story is one that communicates — not just facts, but a vibrant, palpable sense of the life, the people, the context, and the events that they represent. The true power of story, however, lies not simply in its recording, but rather in its telling. In order for stories to remain alive and vital parts of our on-going life narratives they must be told and re-told. And it is this process of telling and re-telling life stories that links our past to our present and points the way to our future.

## The Story of Rural Life

### Part I. The Beginning

> *We have been repeatedly warned that we cannot know where we wish to go if we do not know where we have been.*
>
> *Wendell Berry*

It is difficult today to imagine ourselves a predominantly rural people, with a greater reliance on nature than on commerce or technology for our subsistence. And yet, for centuries prior to the earliest European settlers and for several hundred years afterward that is precisely how the majority of people lived in this place. Even at late as 1850, little more than 10% of the population of the United States lived in cities, only nine of which were larger than 50,000 people (Degler, 1970). Though our identity as a rural people had waned dramatically by the turn of the century, the fact remains that until this time, the vast wilderness, what settlers referred to as the roaming free lands, had been, perhaps, the single most defining feature of this nation and its people.

In this century, numerous social, political, and ecological movements have attempted to stem the widespread urbanization of our country with varying degrees of success. Though the intention of many such movements was to preserve the environment and support rural life, the pervasiveness of urban influence was evident even in some of the more prominent efforts. Of President Roosevelt's reasons for the establishment of the Country Life Commission in 1908, Carl Degler (1970) writes:

> *It was the President himself who asked, "How can the life of a farm family be made less solitary, fuller of opportunity, freer from drudgery, more comfortable, happier, and more attractive?" Such a question was itself a severe indictment of what life on the farm was. And when the Commission had completed its inquiry, it reported in the same vein as the President's charge: "Agriculture is not commercially as profitable as it is entitled to be for the labor and energy that the farmer expends and the risks that he assumes" (no one seemed willing to admit that the farmer was now a producer in a market in which the supply was far outrunning the demand) "and . . . the social conditions in the open country are far short of their possibilities." In brief, farming was hardly the wholesome, satisfying existence American had thought it was; the problem of "How you gonna' keep 'em down on the farm" long antedated any visit to Paree (p. 327).*

I do not mean to suggest that either President Roosevelt or the Country Life Commission was anti-rural; on the contrary, the report contains many examples of the benefits of country living. In fact, in many ways, the report echoes sentiments of agricultural historians and popular writers of the day who believed that farm life offered greater economic security and a healthier and more stable living than did city life (Harvey, 1894; Johnstone, 1940). Still, the reach of urban influence was felt with growing frequency in rural areas across the country. And as the lure of the city grew stronger, the ways of city life seemed to become the norm by which all other styles and standards of living would be measured.

In rural areas, nowhere was this more evident than in the clash of old and new ideas about farm size and productivity. It is here that the sentiment embodied in the phrase, "bigger is better" found its foothold in rural life, an ideological shift that would eventually result in massive changes in both the structure and lifestyle of rural communities. Ironically, it is the very same ideological foothold that many rural communities today are trying to loosen. With current initiatives in areas such as education, economic development, and the environment, rural communities are mounting a new resistance to an old problem.

Still, revitalizing rural communities will require more than simply loosening an ideological foothold. I would also add that the plight of rural communities today is not just a problem affecting rural people. In Garret Keizer's (1988) words, "civilization begins with agriculture" (p. 22), meaning, of course, that the *civitas* cannot exist without farmers producing enough food to sustain it and themselves. The problem, as Keizer sees it, is that too many people have "come to regard rural and urban as opposites rather than complements" (p. 23). If in fact we are as historically interdependent as Keizer suggests, then it seems clear that the future of rural communities and rural ways of living depends, in part, on how much we as a nation are willing to invest in our own history. But before we can invest in it, we have to know it and know what led us away from it; in short, we need to know the lessons of our past that will help us take new steps toward ensuring our future.

## Part II. The Exodus

> *I have dreamed on this mountain since first I was my mother's*
> *daughter and you can't just take my dreams away, not with me watching . . You*
> *may drive a big machine, but I was born a great big woman*
> *and you can't just take my dreams away, without me fighting. . .*
>
> *Holly Near*

There is something extraordinary about the human spirit under siege that somehow finds its way to rise in the face of incredible hardship and oppression, infusing hearts and bodies with a strength that comes not from the struggle itself, but from the dream of living beyond it. Dreams such as these are born of defiance wherever life or ways of living are threatened. They find hope in the ancient and enduring wisdom of the land. Above all, they refuse to lie down beneath the turning wheels of change — not while there is one left to watch, one left to fight, one left to tell the story of the mountain and the generations of daughters and sons she bore to this land.

In a way, rural areas have been under siege for most of the last two centuries. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the mechanization of farms led to a radical shift away from a small, family-based agrarian culture to large-scale production both in the farming industry and in factories across the United States. This shift that began in the Civil War, found its apotheosis in the heavy globalization of American culture that began with the end of World War II (Degler, 1970). But it was the accumulative effect of a series of tragic events that directly preceded the war that made this time such a defining moment in the history of rural life in this country.

In 1931, following the depression, farmers all across the mid-west struggled, many in vain, to sustain their farms through one of the worst droughts in history. The heavy dust-storms that followed one year later ravaged the land and left farmers with little hope of survival (Fitchen, 1991). With the help of government and private relief efforts, some chose to stay and rebuild their farms; many others, however left the countryside for good and went in search of work in urban areas where jobs and industry were fast on the rise. As the country moved rapidly toward greater urbanization, the way of the farmer was quickly growing dim (Degler, 1970).

The second great migration from rural areas to cities began in earnest at the end of World War II when millions joined in the effort to build highways connecting the major urban centers across the country — what some believe to be the largest public construction project since the building of the Roman Empire. They came from every corner of the country, black and white, men, women and children, most looking for work. Many were lured away by the bright lights of city life, but there were other reasons, as well. In the south, black families headed north, desperately trying to flee a life bounded by fear and racism. In droves, they fled to the cities of Chicago, New York, Detroit and Cleveland in search of "work, bread, and not least, the promise of a new life — the vote, the dignity of citizenship, release from a fear the sheriff and his deputies, or a lynch mob, constantly imposed" (Coles, 1977; xiii).

The enormity of the impact of these migrations from Rural America on the urbanization of this country has yet to be rivaled. The tide had turned, and the agrarian way of life would never again know the prominence it had enjoyed before this time. But perhaps the greatest tragedy of these events was that we as a people would very quickly begin to lose not only our reliance on the land but also our understanding of the necessity of its great resources in our lives. Cities were bigger, faster, more efficient, and seemingly more economical. All of this meant more resources and more opportunity for less cost. But even those who remained in rural areas would feel the strong arm of this new ideology taking hold in their communities. The new wave of cost effective living had arrived; in rural communities that spelled consolidation.

## Part III. The War and Fallout of Consolidation

The years that followed the great out-migrations from rural areas to urban centers were marked by enormous economic hardship. It was during this period of economic crisis that the consolidation movement was ushered in, and its impact felt almost immediately in rural areas across the country. Few aspects of rural life escaped its reach. Family farms, which had been the foundation of rural economy, were bought out in many rural areas by large corporate owners. But these new owners, as Wendell Berry (1995) points out, had a new agenda for farming practices. Reliance on the sun as a "cheap, clean, and . . . limitless energy" source was abandoned in favor of the "expensive, filthy, and limited energy of the fossil fuels" (p. 2). Further, farmers were replaced by machines and chemicals while these large corporations "bought cheap and sold high the products that, as a result of this agenda, have been increasingly difficult for farmers to produce" (p. 3).

Education in rural areas also suffered the so-called "benefits" of consolidation. Small community schools were closed and the children sent to newer, larger regional schools. The ruling notion supporting this plan, of course, was that bigger was better — that larger schools would be more efficient and have more resources than the smaller schools. But embedded in this notion was also the prevailing attitude about the inadequacies of rural life and the "backwards" or simple nature of rural people. In his brilliant account of the life of tenant farmers in the south, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, James Agee (1939, 1988) wrote eloquently about the problem of seeing, or rather, *not* seeing rural people, particularly rural children as having any hope of receiving the advantages of a qualified education. To consider the centralization of resources in the education of rural children as the best solution to the economic hardships of small-town schools is to overlook the wealth of knowledge, sensibility and history embodied in the relationship between a community and its children (Casey, 1997). Consolidation, the primary aim of which has been to save costs while improving rural education, has been described as the single most damaging policy decision regarding the quality of schooling and sustainability of rural communities made in this century (Monk, 1991; Stephens, 1991; Sher, 1986).

There have been a significant number of arguments made opposing consolidation, also on the basis of cost, though not so much in a monetary sense as in a cultural sense. There is no dollar value that can be easily assigned to the personal interactions between teachers and students, schools and communities or the individualized instruction and family-like atmosphere that were traditionally seen as strengths of rural schools. It is difficult to imagine how the relative gains of consolidation could begin to compensate for the loss of such valuable cultural capital (Miller, 1993; Monk, 1991). In the foreword to *Education in Rural America,* Robert Coles (1977) argues that consolidation represents a greater threat to the well-being of rural children and their families than the problems associated with living in small towns with limited resources. In his view, consolidation is modernization's assault on the values of rural life: "All too often, rural children are not so much short-changed by inadequate school facilities, books, and supplies — the physical or technological side of education — as by a more insidious, and arguably, more dangerous assault . . .[on their] intelligence and sensibility . . . in the name of "modernization" or "progress" (xiv-xv).

While the resistance has grown stronger in recent years, opponents of consolidation began speaking out not long after it started. Joyce Stern (1994), explains how, despite efforts to provide contrary evidence to the perceived wisdom of consolidation as a course of action, these arguments went unheard, or at least unheeded. She writes:

> *Nearly 30 years ago, a study was released comparing certain non-academic outcomes in small and large high schools in Kansas (Barker & Gump, 1964). The researchers found clear evidence of affective advantages for students in smaller schools, for example greater participation in school activities, sports and greater personal satisfaction (Fowler, 1992). The 1964 study received little attention, at the time; rather the country soon after experienced widespread efforts to enlarge schools and districts. These state policies stemmed from recommendations made by James Conant, president of Harvard University, who argued in 1967 that high*

> *school classes of at least 100 were needed for curriculum comprehensiveness, particularly in the study of foreign language and advanced subjects. Successive waves of consolidation, including that following the Conant recommendations reduced the number of school districts from a high of 128,000 in 1932 to 22,000 by the end of the 60's. There are currently under 15,000 school districts (p. 55).*

At present, there is no strong evidence of the benefits that proponents of consolidation claimed it would provide for rural school districts (Rincones, 1988; Sher, 1995) On the contrary, findings of more recent studies suggest that schooling in smaller environments has a more positive effect on all levels of student performance and attitudes toward schooling (Fowler, 1992; Walberg & Fowler, 1987). What is clear, however, is that the consolidation of rural schools has succeeded in stretching, and in some cases, even severing the bonds that have historically linked schools and their communities. It is a growing belief that a key element in the success of rural school reform is the level of community involvement. This means, however, that rural communities need to be as much a focus of study and revitalization as schools. Shifting the focus from schools to communities will hardly be an easy task. In this area there is still much work to be done.

## Part IV. The Current Stories in Rural Research

While the literature reflects a dramatic increase in research in rural education over the last 10 years, a major focus of many of these studies has been schools — mainly, policy issues related to school reform, consolidation, curriculum development and rural economic decline (Seal & Hobart, 1995; Fitchen, 1991; Reid & Frederick, 1990). Other main areas of research in rural education include outcome studies identifying predictors of academic performance (Monk & Haller, 1993; Monk, 1991; Cobb, McIntire & Pratt, 1989); dropout rates, (Smith, Beaulieu, and Israel, 1992; Sherman, 1992); and a number of comparative studies highlighting urban and rural differences (Pollard and O'Hare, 1990; Haller and Virkler, 1992; Coladarci and McIntire, 1988).

Since the findings of these studies are largely grounded in national, aggregated data, the profiles of rural education that they can provide are limited. A serious implication of national or regional-based studies is that these data tend to gloss over or obscure important differences that show the diversity in rural areas in terms of population, geography, culture, and language within and across states. And while each of these studies appears to promote a genuine concern for the lives and welfare of rural youth, few seem to focus on what is good about their actual experience of rural life (Fowler & Walberg, 1991, Smithmier, 1994). Further, it is clear from a review of current literature on rural areas, particularly rural education, that there is a critical need for more careful and systematic studies of the relationships between rural schools and their communities (Casey, 1997).

As was mentioned earlier, another significant problem in the existing literature on rural life is the negative frame in which it has often been cast. In many studies, rurality is often synonymous with deficiency - - rural schools are depicted as too small, offering too narrow a curriculum and lacking the resources necessary for their own survival (Howley & Howley, 1995). The claim that these problems might exist is not in dispute; that it contains the implicit notion that such risk factors are inherent in rural life, however, is open to dispute.

Even more troubling is the tendency, where schools are seen as deficient, to assign the same label, by association, to rural students. The result is a kind of negative stereotyping of rural youth that is pervasive and one that places them at psychological, as well as academic risk. What is needed is a definition of the term rural that is authentic to those who identify as rural people and rural communities — a redefining of the term based on experience rather than stereotypes, characteristics rather than caricatures, qualities rather than quantities, and values rather than products.

## Part V. The Problem of Definition

Any conversation about rural areas inevitably leads to the problem of defining what is meant by "rural." The diversity of landscapes is so vast that it is impossible to find simple descriptors that connote a general sense of rural place. Depending on what part of the country we live in, the word rural could bring to mind images of flat lands or rolling hills; corn or wheat fields; acres lined with fruit trees, vegetables, cotton, or tobacco. Our mountains may range from dense forest to barren rock, to snow and ice, or to massive ascents of red clay, shimmering in the haze of an unforgiving sun. And though generally we are slower to think of our oceans and waterways as rural places, they too, possess qualities of wilderness unique to marsh lands and to certain coastal areas. While these images provide a good sense of the range of rural regions in this country it is clear that there is not one definition that would apply to all of them.

If the diversity of rural settings makes finding a suitable and comprehensive definition of rural a challenging task, what is even more problematic is that too often we frame the question solely on the basis of *what*, rather than *who* we mean by rural. It is important to consider that the term carries a cultural as well as a descriptive meaning. What is at issue here is not simply establishing criteria for a community's rurality; at its core, rural holds in its meaning the personal, social and cultural identity of a people and their way of life, and it is this deeper meaning of the term that is too often overlooked or dismissed.

But even here we find distortion. As Jonathan Sher (1977) writes: "One popular image of rural America is that of an agglomeration of farmers and farm workers. Yet, as of 1975, over 80 percent of America's rural population neither lived nor worked on farms (p. 1)." The fact is that the major industries in rural areas are no longer agriculturally-based or even related to natural resources (Stern, 1994). If it is true that these images are archaic, then clearly we need to adjust our perceptions to meet the present reality of rural life. These notions of rural people, rural communities and rural conditions, however, all stem from one basic question: what do we mean by rural?

A common definition of rural America is as much based on what it is not than what it is; to put it another way, rural is simply the opposite of urban — it *is* whatever urban *isn't* (Fitchen, 1991; Sher, 1977). According to the US Census Bureau, rural is assigned as a demographic label to areas with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants. A community's rurality is usually measured by population density, number of square miles of open farmland or country, and distance from the nearest urban or metropolitan area. Because of the fact that state governments have the authority to define rurality according to their own statutes there is no consistency in either the use or the application of the term from state to state. In some states, "rural" and "non-metropolitan" are used interchangeably, even though the term "non-metropolitan" refers to counties outside of large metropolitan areas of 50,000 or more (Stern, 1994). While the differences between these two terms could not be more evident, the fact that they are used interchangeably in some areas highlights the need for a more accurate definition of rural.

To many who live in rural areas, however, the term is much more than a statistic. Rural conveys a sense of identity and lifestyle, as well as certain values, beliefs and customs. Descriptors such as close-knit, family-like, personal touch, and local pride are considered valued characteristics of rural community life (Haas & Lambert, 1995; Sher, 1995). Other characteristics of rural life include a philosophy of living that is democratically-based, socially egalitarian and fiercely independent (Beaver, 1986; Herzog & Pitman, 1995; Sher, 1977).

These last three characteristics — democracy, egalitarianism, and independence have historically been considered foundational ideological elements of rural life. The isolation and remoteness that was common to most rural areas at one time in this country imbued both the individual and the community with a sense of governing power that was far greater than that of the state or federal authority. People in rural communities relied on themselves for providing the necessary care, order, and infrastructure needed to raise and educate their children, to support their economy, to attend to their spiritual and healthcare needs, and to maintain an honest and healthy way of life.

Democratic ideals, tempered by a strong sense of justice and fairness thrived in these areas, as did a sense of independence, witnessed most clearly in rural folks' distrust of "big government." It could be argued that local governance represented the core of their lives, where life was guided, more often than not, by the democratic principles of social equality and respect for all members of a given community. Maintaining these principles was central to who they were as rural people; consequently, it was also a matter of deep personal and communal pride (Agee, 1939; Beaver, 1986). Myles Horton (1990) once wrote that the basic tenet of democracy is a belief in a people's capacity to develop the skill and ability to govern themselves. Whatever these early rural communities lacked in resources or opportunity they made up for in a belief in themselves that was unwavering.

Today, many rural people still uphold the principles of democracy, equality and independence as core features of their communities. And yet, in light of continuing economic decline, advances in technology, widespread access to the internet, and other factors associated with urban expansion, it might be more accurate to say that these principles represent the rural ideal rather than the rural reality. For one thing, few rural areas are as isolated as they once were, making local governance somewhat more difficult to contain to local influence and assessment. Moreover, as the on-going annexation of rural areas, in the wake of urban sprawl and the out-migration of rural youth, continues, rural communities are finding themselves in a precarious position; not only is the viability of rural life threatened, so too, is a philosophy of living that is supported and made possible by the social, environmental and economic conditions unique to country life (Miller, 1993).

Whether or not these principles represent an ideal or a reality, one thing is certain: that they hold within them the blueprint of a way of life that is currently struggling to reclaim its place and its voice in the heart of this country. And as this struggle gains momentum, many rural communities across the country are taking stock of where they are, where they have come from and reassessing where they go from here. In the process, many have come to realize that the essential question in this reclaiming of place and voice is not what does rural mean, but rather what does it mean to *be* rural. What is at stake here is not simply a philosophy or an ideology, but a social, spiritual, political and psychological identity that is distinctly rural.

The importance of rural identity was underscored in a passionate and moving address to a gathering at the recent Rural Challenge Rendezvous in Granby, Colorado, by Devin Smither, a high school student from Ed-Couch Elsa, Texas. In his comments, Devin referred to the cultural differences in rural areas across the country as the "detail", the "specificity" that defines rural people:

> *The reason that I am up here today is that I have discovered something about the Rural Challenge, but also about rural as a quality, as something that is appreciated in an aesthetic sense. It is not the general sense of the word that people are here for. It is the specific one, the one that is detailed. We are here to celebrate and encourage our own different forms of rurality. That is the entire point of our presence here, it seems to me. We are trying to keep from being swindled into believing that urbanity is the world, that it is all that matters. We are also trying to avoid a worse fate. We are saving ourselves from being sucked back into the black hole that is lost identity, the belief in our uselessness. We are attempting to defy what up until recently seemed an eventual certainty. And it is not through our use of the word rural that we will succeed, but through our individual identities.*

The issue of identity is a key concern in the writings of many rural authors. In a marvelous autobiographical account of his life as a teacher in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, Garret Keizer (1988) uses allegory and metaphor to describe the ways in which rural communities define the people who live there; rural is not just a place, it is the context — it is *who* they are:

> *I am writing an essay on teaching in a rural community. It is that simply because a rural community is the only place in which I have taught. Rurality is my context more than my subject, though to some extent it must be both. I write . . . .not as a soldier would write about making war in a desert — where lack of water and cover define the very strategy — but as a lover might write about his affair in a village, where the mountains and verandahs have determined the moods and the occasions of love, but have made the loving itself little different than it is everywhere else. At least this is what I suppose — as I say, I have taught no place else but here (p. 3).*

And in *Growin' Up Country* (1989), a collection of songs, poems, reflections and autobiographical accounts of growing up in Appalachia, Susan, a woman from Logan County, West Virginia begins a story of her childhood in this way:

> *You ask me to tell you who I am. I understand your reason, but I shy away from saying, for I am a product of my experiences and my being is so closely tied to the*

> *history of my people. I can best relate who I am now by telling you where I've been. Three things have been constantly with me through my whole development — coal, poverty, and my family. When I was little, that was the whole world (p. 50).*

The history of any people must include those characteristics that define them and set them apart as uniquely diverse from those who are members of other communities. Or as Susan suggests, we cannot say who we really are without knowing the history of our people and where they've been. But *where they've been* is not, as Garret Keizer suggests, just a place; rather it is the context, or the basis of who they are. In rural life, *community* is the context; as such, it is, as anthropologist, Janet Fitchen (1991) suggests, the social and symbolic basis of rural identity. Fitchen argues that it is the psychological sense, more than just the physical sense of community, that supports and promotes a sense of belonging, "not only *to* a place, but *in* its institutions and *with* its people" (p. 253). Bruce Miller (1993) of the Northwest Regional Laboratory agrees. In an article on the importance of community in rural survival he argues that "the psychological sense of community may be the pivotal axis upon which successful community development turns" (p. 87). The point is, community, as a social and symbolic entity, represents the collective body of individuals who contribute to and rely on the whole for their sense of identity — of *who* they are.

The three institutions that are considered central features of all rural communities are family, church, and school. While all three play a vital role in the life of their communities, schools are currently seen as having the greatest chance of making a significant impact in the movement to revitalize rural life (Miller, 1993; Sher, 1995; Stern, 1994). In her summary of the findings in the 1994 U.S. Department of Education report, *The Condition of Education in Rural Schools*, editor, Joyce Stern remarked that the bond between rural schools and their communities was not only a valued element of rural life but it was also identified as a potentially powerful resource to rural communities as they struggle to maintain their viability. She writes:

> *The link between the community and the school is a defining feature of most rural settlements and can be a major source of strength to its citizens and to the quality of education offered there. Many communities are exploring new avenues for this relationship to the mutual benefit of the school and community (p. 69)."*

While there may not be a single definition of rural that satisfies all places and perspectives, what seems elemental to all notions of rural is the centrality of land in rural people's lives. Land is the spatial basis of rural identity (Fitchen, 1991) and in almost every rural community it is considered its most valuable resource (Keizer, 1988; Beaver, 1986). It is also the central organizing feature of what we mean when we speak about preserving the commonwealth of our communities (Berry, 1995).

The relationship between land and community is far from symbolic; the borders of any rural community are defined, not by street posts but by the land on which its members live. But land is also the spatial grounding of the social relationships within a given community (Fitchen, 1991). These relationships among families, neighbors, and other individuals form the boundaries of the social community which, in turn, forms boundaries of the space in which they reside. Therefore, definitions of rural are determined, at least in part, by the relationships of land and people that are bound together in communities of diverse rural places and configurations all across the country.

Such reciprocity between community and land is possible, however, only when a long-term investment has been made by a particular community in a particular place. In almost all rural communities, membership in the community is determined by the length of time a family or an individual has lived there. It can take newcomers to a rural community as much as two or three generations of their offspring living there before being confirmed as "one of us." And the longer people stay in one place, they become more one with the land on which they are living. So it is quite common to hear local folks refer to a particular house or farm as the "McClean's place," for instance, long after the McCleans no longer lived there.

To reside in a place, however, is not only to live there for a long time but also to be vested in that place. Historically, land was the foundation on which communities built not just their homes, but their dreams and hopes for the future. For generations in the lives of rural people, the land has been their legacy as well as their livelihood. And although fewer rural families today are actually making a living on their land, the sense of its place and importance in their lives remains strong and vital (Beaver, 1986; Fitchen, 1991).

## Part VI. Bringing It All Back Home

*We shall not cease from exploration*
*And the end of all our exploring*
*Will be to arrive where we started*
*And know the place for the first time*
*T.S. Eliot*

All explorations begin with a question. Presumably, we explore something so we can know it better and then, hopefully, teach others what we have learned. Where our questions lead us, and what they can teach us, however, depends on how well we are able to commit ourselves to being learners. As Myles Horton (1990) says, "education is what happens to the other person, not what comes out of the mouth of the educator" (p. 131).

In the process of writing this paper I realized, also, that "education is what happens" when we believe that there is something worth learning. In listening for the story of rural life I have learned that there are many stories, told from many different perspectives and in many different voices. As there is no one definition of rural, likewise, there is no one story of rural life. But there is a story that needs telling, one that relates a better sense of the urgency and shifting ground that many rural communities today are experiencing. And as the ground shifts, so must the story. Old definitions of rural need to be re-negotiated to fit the new reality. Keeping alive images that are outdated for the sake of nostalgia is just not good enough; to treat rural people and places this way is to suggest that there is nothing new to say about rural areas, or worse, nothing real about rural areas left to tell.

What I have learned, or perhaps re-learned is that to some extent we are all rural people, at least by virtue of our inheritance as citizens of a nation that for generations lived an agrarian existence. This is our history, if not our experience. And it is a proud history, one that has, for better or for worse, shaped the conversation that we now find ourselves engaged in across many cultures and places, diverse in multiple ways, yet, all distinctly rural. In small movements here and there, the dream of rural life as a viable existence has survived, tucked away in the mountains of Appalachia and the great western plains, in the wheat fields of the mid-west and the cotton fields of the south, in the desert plains of the southwest and the forests of the northeast kingdom. And others have joined this rural movement and have taken up the challenge to strengthen rural communities and to teach our children about the places where they live and about the great resources of nature. This is what the Rural Challenge is all about — making rural communities a vital part of our way of life in this country and a vital part of our story as a people.

Today, as in the past, these movements are inspired by those who understand and appreciate the importance of place and of the ecology that supports and makes a place distinct. Philosophers, naturalists, educators, researchers, and poets, alike, have been writing for years about the endangered state of natural environments in this country. Wordsworth recognized the danger we faced in turning away from what he saw as an intrinsic connection between ourselves and nature. In his sonnet, "The world is too much with us; late and soon," his opening words read as an indictment of our society, which he suggests has been so taken by the false wealth of the mechanized world that we have set nature aside and, in so doing, we have wasted our most powerful and valuable resource:

*The world is too much with us; late and soon*
*Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers*
*Little we see in Nature that is ours;*
*We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!*

To lose sight of ourselves in Nature is to lose touch with a vital part of the essence of who we are as a people — our identity, our sense of rootedness, of place, of the road leading from our past and the road that stretches out before us toward our future. In the wake of this massive urban tide it could be said that we no longer find ourselves enchanted with nature; we have conquered it, mechanized it and in so doing we have "given our hearts away, a sordid boon." Perhaps we would do well to recall the words recited by thousands of young people across the United States who have pledged their lives and their resources to the preservation of the land. There is no better example, no finer inspiration for the work we have set about to do than the creed of the Future Farmers of America. We include it here, in its entirety:

> *I believe in the future of farming with a faith born not of words but of deeds — achievements won by the present and past generations of agriculturists; in the promise of better days through better ways, even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us through the struggles of former years.*
>
> *I believe that to live and work on a good farm, or to be engaged in other agricultural pursuit, is pleasant as well as challenging; for I know the joys and discomforts of agricultural life hold an inborn fondness for those associations which,*

> *even in hours of discouragement, cannot deny.*
> *I believe in leadership from ourselves and respect from others. I believe in my own ability to work efficiently and think clearly, with such knowledge and skill as I can secure, and in the ability of progressive agriculturists to serve our own and the public interest in producing and marketing the product of our toil.*
> *I believe in less dependence on begging and more power in bargaining; in the life abundant and enough honest wealth to help make it so — for others as well as myself; in less need for charity and more of it when needed; in being happy myself and playing square with those whose happiness depends upon me.*
> *I believe that rural America can and will hold true to the best traditions of our national life and that I can exert an influence in my home and community which will stand solid for my part in that inspiring task.*

Where we go from here is a question that occupies a place in the hearts and minds of all who are invested in the future of rural communities. For *our* part, it seems that the time has come to reclaim the story that was once not simply a story, but a proud and sustaining existence. In our work, the challenge is for us to render our hearing of the story of rural life in a way that honors the experiences of those who have lived it and those of us who wish to contribute to its on-going preservation. And while there will be many ways to account for where we have been and what we have heard and seen and done, it may be that the full measure of our learning will be clear to us when, as the poet, T.S. Eliot suggests, upon reaching the end of all our exploring we shall again "arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

# DEMOCRACY, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

**Carla Fontaine**

> *To close a country school was to destroy an institution that held the little rural community together. It was to wipe out the one building the people of the district had in common and, in fact, to destroy the community, which, in those years, so many were trying to save and strengthen. Even more important...the destruction of their school meant that their power...would be taken from them and given to some board far removed from their community and their control.*[1]

One of the great educational debates of the last decades of the nineteenth century revolved around matters of school organization and governance. While centralization of schools ultimately won out, it is clear that centralization wasn't the only option or even the best option. Had democracy been the principal interest, schools would have remained closer to the families being served by schools. It is also possible that rural communities would have developed differently had the belief in centralization of schools and socio-economic structures not been so pervasive.

I will re-introduce in this essay some of the virtues of small schools and communities historically in relation to democracy. My purpose is to re-visit the issue as the Rural Challenge seeks to look back as one means of going forward. In doing so, I acknowledge that I present what may seem an idealized view. The locally controlled, community-based schools of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not all havens of goodwill or fueled by democratic impulses. African-Americans and Native Americans struggled almost everywhere for a genuine education that was respectful, that was aimed at full participation in the society. And there were periods of uncontrolled nativism that caused enormous distress for those who were different ethnically and religiously. Yet, the language of democracy and hopes for something better remained strong. Even in the worst of times, those larger hopes were present, brought forward as something to work toward. It is the larger vision that I have chosen to address as it is the vision the Rural Challenge most wishes to affirm.

## The Rhetoric of Centralization

A Michigan educator, speaking to a group of professionals in 1879, embodied some of the centralizing rhetoric of that period, noting:

> *The only way I see to better the condition of the (country) schools is to take just as much of their control out of the hands of the people as is possible. The people do not know the needs of the schools. They have been educated in these poor schools, and until the schools are better the people will be ignorant...Centralization is what we need in school management.*[2]

Such words, expressing the sentiment of vocal 'experts' in the late 19th century, heralded a diminishment of local control of education and the consequent decline of that community voice so vital to direct democracy. The loss of small community schools and the resulting erosion of grass-roots democracy has had serious consequences for a society founded on the premise that schools were the great 'engines' of democracy.

Rural schools historically played a crucial role in localizing interest, fostering democracy, and providing "nerve centers of society"[3] in local communities. In order to better understand how small, seemingly independent schools — the pillars of democracy in our society — responded to the mandates dictating consolidation into more 'efficiently' managed, standardized institutions, one must consider the history of rural schools and communities and the forces exerted by state governments and various centralizing agencies.

## Rural Schools as Community Centers and Laboratories of Democracy

"Both literally and symbolically the school and the schoolhouse stood at the center of the community. The school was, in many cases, the community's most expensive and significant creation."[4] In addition to the educational and social purposes schools served, they were symbols of communal identity. "Often the only public building in the neighborhood, [the school] gave the community its identity, so that farmers might say they lived in the Gravel Hill District or the Eureka District..."[5] Over the years such local language has been lost.

Historically, rural schools have been critical community centers. The schoolhouse was a natural gathering place for important debates about local matters. It was within the schools, as community centers, that direct democracy occurred. It was often *about* the school that feelings crystallized into opinions voiced by invested citizens. Schoolhouse walls echoed with the high pitch of emotion as local citizens argued over required textbooks, an increase in teachers' salaries, or — as would have been heard in some schools in Oklahoma — the need to re-sod the walls. In the community school building, tempers flared, as citizens argued together, humor appreciated its most public manifestation, and eventual compromise was reached as citizens participated in the democratic process.[6]

Locally organized public schools provided hands-on experience with the democratic process. Community schools instructed, facilitated and encouraged democratic participation. They were:

> *invaluable laboratories of democracy in which rural Americans learned the importance of their vote, how to make laws, and how to govern themselves. They wrestled with such intricacies as bond issues, taxes, and contingency funds, and if they had greater confidence in democracy than other groups of Americans, it was because democracy was no abstraction to them. In their school districts they learned that their vote made a difference, that they could change what they did not like, and that democracy actually worked.* [7]

Fund-raisers such as pie, box, or corn mush socials brought local citizens together in the school house. Seemingly disparate functions such as religious meetings, community dances, Grange meetings, and card-playing groups were commonplace occurrences within the schoolhouse walls. As social centers, rural schools helped dispel the loneliness so inherent in isolated areas.

### Public Schools: "Raking the Geniusses from the Rubbish"

To pursue the ideal of democracy and to prepare citizens to participate in a republic, Thomas Jefferson proposed a universal system of free public schools. As the most prominent and vocal proponent of free public education, Jefferson believed it to be a means by which "the best geniusses [would] be raked from the rubbish."[8] Jefferson saw free public education as instrumental to the preservation of the republic:

> *...education is the most certain and the most legitimate engine of government. Educate and inform the whole mass of the people, enable them to see that it is in their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve it...They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.*[9]

Through equal access to education, Jefferson asserted, future leaders would rise on their own merit. Firmly believing in the equalizing impact free public education would have on society, Jefferson proposed a "pyramidal system of education reaching from district elementary schools"[10] to state universities and, ultimately, a national university. He proposed that such a university would strengthen national unity by providing a place for potential leaders from the various regions of the country to come together and realize commonalities and appreciate differences. George Washington, another advocate of a national university, left money in his will for such an institution. However, a "widespread belief that schooling should be a matter of local initiative and control"[11] prevented the implementation of such a plan.

*The Land Ordinance of 1785,* which was drafted by Thomas Jefferson and enacted by The Articles of Confederation government and consequently adopted into many of the 'Old Northwest' state constitutions, reserved one lot in each 'Northwest' township for public schools. The states that emerged in the Northwest territory — Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin — subscribed, from their inception, to the philosophy espoused in the Ordinance that "religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall be forever encouraged."[12] It was here that schools assumed a particularly rich democratic heritage.

The vital role of education in a democratic process played out differently in the major regions of the country as each responded to the need for free public education. Each region's unique approach can be attributed to its highly individualistic sense of identity.

### New England

In New England, where the Puritan commitment to education permeated the settlements, there was an early commitment to common schools. Provisions for schools as very local institutions were established as early as 1642 in Massachusetts Bay Colony. Schools became more common, however, in the early 19th century. In this region, too, town meetings were instituted allowing yet another regionally unique form of democratic participation. Not surprisingly, schools were often the early venue for such town meetings.

### The South

Prior to 1860 in the South, attention to education was primarily an individual concern and it wasn't until Northern reformers and philanthropists imposed education as a vehicle of reform after the Civil War that common schools were established there. "As uncharitable toward southern civilization as they had been toward southern slavery 'northern spokesmen' insisted that the ante-bellum South had produced neither education nor art nor literature nor science worthy of the name, and they proposed to make up these deficiencies by 'Americanizing' the defeated region."[13]

It took longer for common schools to become firmly established in the South. Nonetheless, by the end of the 19th century, elementary schooling had become almost universal and secondary schools were becoming more common especially in larger towns and cities. The burdens of a dual system of education that was firmly established by 1880, one system for African Americans, and one for Caucasians, however, limited the possibilities for many more decades. Equity and democracy writ large were hostages.

### The Middle West

In the Middle West, participation by citizens (primarily farmers) in the decisions regarding the district schools exemplified, perhaps, the most tangible form of democracy.

> *...in all America there was, perhaps, no better symbol of the shared community life people remembered than the one-room schoolhouse standing in the center of an independent school district on the Middle Border. From first to last that schoolhouse represented a community enterprise. The people of the district had voted for its construction, picked the place where it would stand, and controlled its use when it was completed. At one stage or another of this process, they had, in most cases, even fought over it as families fight; yet it belonged to all the district's families, and because it was their own, most people in the community were interested in what took place there.*[14]

In the Middle West, grass-roots initiative was evident as citizens had a voice in the levying of taxes, maintaining the schoolhouse, and resolving conflicts about new school finances — who to hire to re-do the blackboard, and how much firewood was sufficient for a term of school. Decisions having financial implications often inspired debate as evidenced by this note about a Tecumseh Township School Board meeting in Michigan in 1889: "The amount of wood in the woodpile became a bone of contention. The farmers were so obviously suspicious of one another that they appointed a committee of two, presumably one for each side, to appraise the woodpile and report back to the annual meeting before a vote could be taken on the fuel issue."[15]

The community school provided the vehicle for direct democratic citizen involvement and voice — for there was no denying the investment most citizens had in their schools. "For many citizens discussing school matters was their only opportunity for political participation and they guarded it quite jealously."[16] Fundamental matters with health implications such as how to properly get water for each student during the course of the day were voted on as zealously as were teachers' salary issues. In Dane County, Wisconsin, in 1911, school board members "voted to have the children fill their cups with the dipper rather than dipping their cups in the water pail."[17]

## Webster's Blue Black Speller—The Great Equalizer?

Rural communities, often considered the poor 'country cousins' to those in more cosmopolitan urban areas, were quite proud if one of their scholars could spell a word from the last pages of Webster's Blue Black Speller for this meant that their students, teachers, and schools were as competent and capable as their urban counterparts.

Noah Webster emphasized the importance of uniform elocution in enabling and proving the realization of the democratic vision. He proposed that Americans use language as a unifying feature rather than as a way to determine class, rank, or regional differences as was so prevalent in European society. Therefore, his speller encouraged learners to spell and pronounce words syllable by syllable. Webster marketed his speller as the great equalizer for "if all Americans could read, write, speak, and spell in the same way, it would demonstrate beyond doubt how equal in station they were."[18] Among frontier families who owned books, Webster's Blue-Black Speller was often second only to the Bible in popularity.

In 19th century schools, spelling competitions enabled students from small rural schools to demonstrate their learning and competence. For though rural schools were often forced to make due with fewer resources, they prided themselves on the quality of the education they fostered. This account from a county superintendent and inspector of rural schools in Boyd County, Wisconsin in 1903, addressed the lack of resources but firm commitment to education so apparent in rural communities :

> *The schoolhouse was so humble "we could look out through the roof and see the sun and sky. We could see out the door without opening it. Some of the window lights were out. There were holes in the floor which was laid almost on the earth — just two by two scantlings under it." Yet here in this unlikely place, fourteen students, some of them terribly poor, were being educated in a rigorous fashion. "There was no one staring at us, no laughing at us, no uncomplimentary remarks.*

*Every pupil kept at his work. Classes were called and dismissed in good order.*" The spelling class they witnessed was composed of five little girls and a boy named Dick,

> *"freckle-faced, shabbily dressed...who took his place at the head of the class. As he came to the recitation," the inspector continued, "he pushed one foot along over the rough floor. At first we thought he was lame. But a glance told the cause and we looked the other way. He was wearing an old shoe that would hardly hang on his foot.... Had he lifted his foot the old shoe sole would have flapped...as he walked.... But Dick held his place at the head of the class," and the inspector could see the "proud sparkle in his eyes, the bright gleam on his face, "when he heard the teacher announce: "Dick wins the head mark today."*[19]

The popularity of Webster's Speller throughout much of the 19th century speaks to its perceived power as a tool of democracy. Optimistically, Webster contended that, ultimately, his Speller would do away with differences in regional accents. While many people fondly remember their school spelling bees and may attribute their spelling ability to early exposure to Webster's Speller, Webster's claim to do away with regional accents met with much less success.

## The Closing of the Frontier: Political & Educational Implications

In 1893, to the general alarm of the American public, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner announced that "with the closing of the frontier a crucial factor in maintaining American democracy and openness has gone."[20] The passing of the frontier suggested that the United States was full. With the realization that land was not unlimited, Americans became aware of the possible subsequent scarcity of natural resources. A more conservative attitude toward the allocation and utilization of natural resources developed. The attitude of people "inhabiting a land flowing with milk and honey and building a democratic society where no man had too much yet all had enough [and whose] life on the land had made them individualistic, independent, and resourceful...[whose] ownership of land had given them status and dignity, made them proud, even haughty perhaps, raised them to the equal of any man, and [which] strengthened their nationalism"[21] was changing. The earlier perception of having unlimited resources and boundless opportunity was now tempered with a caution which was mirrored in legislation, educational thought, and social attitude.

## Liberal and Conservative Progressivists

It is difficult to generalize about the impact the closing of the frontier had on the two major political attitudes of the time. For the most part, the South and Middle West continued to encourage citizen participation in government — a view known as liberal progressivism. The farmers in these areas were distrustful of big business and the newly emerging class of 'experts' and believed that real power should reside in the grass-roots of home communities. Their faith in the ability of people to participate in the democratic process, to work for resolution of social issues, was unshaken.

These liberal progressivists were politically opposed by conservative progressivists who were rooted primarily in the Eastern United States and in urban areas. Conservative progressivists felt that the most qualified people to solve conflict or induce progress were those who were scientifically trained expert managers. They believed that the ability of experts to make well-informed, scientific decisions divorced from popular opinion, emotional sentiment, and 'irrationality' should be instrumental in influencing government and legislation. Conservative progressivists supported the utilization of expert opinion for advising state legislators, governors and national political leaders thus, impacting legislation which ultimately effected all the people of the nation. From the turn of the century, the number of experts involved at various governmental levels grew astronomically. Legislators were now lending an attentive ear to fewer local constituents and were increasingly influenced by professional or expert opinion. This indicated a power shift from the voice of the many to the voice of a few. With the erosion of the local base of power and the citizen voice, "the U.S. was becoming what some have dubbed the 'expert society.'"[22]

## Consolidation: For Whom the Bell Tolls

The closing of small schools has resulted in the loss of voice for many people in small rural communities. These people, who were intimately invested in the outcomes of their local schools and who had historically been empowered by the engagement of participatory democracy were now being told, by outsiders, what to do. Experts, far removed from local rural communities, assumed authority and offered advice to rural citizens. Ill-fitting expert advice or mandates resulted. One Boston architect, in 1880, drew plans for rural schools which included decorated cornices, spires, and extravagant ventilating systems. He also included plans for a gardener to take care of the grounds. "But nearly all such plans, although beautifully drawn and expertly explained, were so out of touch with the plain life of the Midwestern farmers and so far beyond their means that they were ignored."[23]

Despite apparent irrelevancies and the obvious lack of a local knowledge of place, opinions of outsiders continued to drive the consolidation process. Eventually communities acquiesced to the persistent voice of experts who declared that they knew what was best for the good of any rural area, experts who claimed to have the generic answer, the one-size-fits-all approach to education. As Robert Coles explains in Education in Rural America, "A people possessed of its own intelligence and sensibility [were] given credit for neither"[24] and authority was assumed by outsiders.

Legislation has effectively undermined the ability of community citizens to make decisions at the local level. In essence, the voice of those 'closest to home,' those with the deepest knowledge of place and local community, have been effectively silenced by a society which deems a deeper reverence for the 'knowledge' of the expert.

Control and power eventually came to reside in the hands of distant legislatures and experts, the professionals, who:

> *like some of the founding fathers at the Constitutional Convention in 1787...believed that the nation's troubles sprang from an "excess of democracy"... professional educators thought that independent school districts which allowed*

> *direct democratic participation were far too democratic to produce good schools...Burke Hinsdale (the primary organizer of the Committee of Twelve's study and report on rural schools in 1896)...pointed out that the democratic theory upon which the district system was based had been replaced by the representative system everywhere in the nation except in education. "The district system is very dear to the hearts of very many people. But anyone who will inquire into the facts can hardly avoid...the conclusion that... it is an absurdity.*[25]

## The Impact of Legislation

Participatory democracy mandated that citizens learn to wrestle with tough choices — to make decisions for the good of the whole community. Acknowledging the value of such discourse, the county superintendent of Fond Du Lac County, Wisconsin, in the late 1800's stated:

> *I know of scarcely any instance in which a smart district quarrel had not been followed by a better state of things in the district; and, although for the time being they may not have been deemed altogether joyous, yet experience teaches that it is often times only through great tribulations that communities as well as individuals are to be lifted to a higher plain of civilization.*[26]

The impact of state legislation which attempted to regulate rural schools in sites far removed from each specific locale stifled local voice and civic participation, effectively disenfranchising a populace which had, at one time, so spiritedly engaged in local government, education and community.

Today, rural schools and their accompanying educational concerns which historically provoked and responded to local representative voice may seem as illusory a concept as the dream of equality under which public schools were originally conceived. Centralization of power, the overwhelming bureaucratization of schools, the increasing utilization of representative -- as opposed to direct -- democracy, and the frequency of local deference to the perceived wisdom of outside experts (or professionals with particular credentials) has worked to undermine the resilient spirit of the citizens of rural schools and rural communities.

Over the years, state and national governments, rife with a host of experts, have wrested voice and power away from local citizens, coercing rural conformity to more urbanized, industrial models of education. The imposition of centralized governance and generic standards has not been salutary for rural schools and communities.

As legislation for consolidation threatens or closes the doors of our last small rural schools, we may be effectively discouraging local activism, inhibiting an altruistic concern for the good of the commonwealth, and disempowering local community voice. As decisions are made farther and farther from home, we discredit the value of local knowledge. Some may wonder, with the final tolling of the school house bell, has the purest form of democracy — that of direct participation — been silenced forever?

Consolidation first began as early as 1869 in New England, but did not impact the Middle West until the last decade of the 19th century when it spread like wild-fire as schoolhouse after schoolhouse was shut down, auctioned off, or abandoned. The most damaging of the consolidations came in the period after the second World War as "expert" opinion pushed for ever larger secondary schools. The rural landscape is now filled with these newer consolidated schools that stand in fields far away from town centers or settled communities, that lack a significant history and identity.

### More Direct Involvement By Local Citizens

We have come full circle. Unhappy with the bureaucratic centralization consolidated schools exemplify, citizens are making efforts to exert more local control. As people at the local level once again become confident in their own knowledge, they are more effectively exerting influence as to what and how their children learn. Group efforts of concerned citizens, working within a democracy, are working to carve out and define community.

Responding to a need for a sense of belonging to a community, an investment in a place and the people of that place, and acting as agents of local voice, the current charter school movement — exemplifies just one of several attempts of local citizens to participate in their local schools, be they urban, suburban or rural. Concerned citizens are becoming more able to set up autonomous schools as they learn to work more effectively with existing school systems to guarantee sensitivity to local constituencies.[27] Ray Budde, author of Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts, acknowledges the value of public investment: "We value what is ours, what belongs to us. Working together with other people in common purpose produces truly amazing results."[28] Beyond charters, smaller consolidated schools are resisting larger consolidation, arguing that they can participate in the revitalization of their communities while offering a superior education. They argue for the virtues of communities and schools needing to be linked, tied to democratic purposes. Educational activist, Tony Wagner asserts in this regard that: "It is increasingly clear as well that significant improvements in learning for all students require closer collaboration between schools and families. People working together in smaller schools can build strong relationships and come to agreement more readily on their unifying mission and core values..."[29]

### Public Sentiment: Democracy and Schools

A recent Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll reflected public sentiment regarding goals for the nation's public schools. The most important goal of public schools, according to respondents, was "to prepare students to be responsible citizens"[30]— an echo of the democratic function of schools as they were originally conceived. The mission of many of the old country schools was to teach students: "the three R's...spelling, history, geography, physiology, and civil government, cultivate in them a love of country, beauty, and truth, improve their manners, and above all raise their moral standards to make them citizens worthy of their great nation."[31] Many people in rural communities want to maintain that legacy.

Helping people to become economically self-sufficient was the goal mentioned second most frequently by Gallup Poll respondents. Historically, as rural communities lost their core with the consolidation of their schools, their economic viability also dwindled. With reduced economic viability, employment-seeking youth went elsewhere. As large numbers of people leave a community, the loss, along with the diminished perception of the desirability of the community as a place to live results in a loss of community and communal identity. With no defining community characteristics, the desire to work to save a community withers away as well.

Today, as we re-acknowledge the value of civic responsibility and begin to re-assert local voice in decision-making, there arises a consequent renewed sense of individual responsibility toward public work within the community. A recent Gallup Poll reflected an increasing commitment to public service within community: 66% of respondents favored community service as a requirement for graduation from high school.

Educator John Dewey perhaps expressed best the valuable interchange between school, community, and democracy years ago:

> *What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy. All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self. Here individualism and socialism are as one. Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself.*[32]

Gallup poll respondents felt that local teachers were most committed to the goal of local public school improvement while the leaders who were farther removed from local schools were perceived as less committed. This speaks to the local control which community members historically exerted in small rural schools. Then, as now, citizens recognize that those within the community are the ones most aware of local concerns, communal needs, and the unique value of place and are, consequently, the ones who should make decisions regarding the education of children within their district or locale. Gallup Poll respondents' perceptions of commitment from most to least was: teachers, school board members, superintendents, governors and state legislators.

People in small communities are able to make informed political decisions as they vote for those they know will represent them well locally...

> *Unlike urban school elections in which the school board candidates were largely unknown to the average voter, the farmers knew the people they voted for extremely well. They saw them in their daily life, visited with them after church, watched them farm, heard them speak at Grange...and had a reasonably good idea of who the most capable among them were...*[333]

The confidence that comes from knowing those who represent you and make decisions about the education of those within your community supersedes the authority of 'experts.'

As children see their parents and other invested citizens actively engaged in the community, they are witnessing role-models for their own democratic participation and empowerment in their community. A survey of successful Indiana professionals indicated that they attributed their success to "their schooling and ...their rural environment. One factor, in particular, to which they all paid tribute was the interest their parents took in their education."[34] Parents and concerned citizens take an interest and participate in their local community when their voice has value — when they are recognized as 'experts' in their own right. We are currently witnessing increasing examples of community people asserting their voices on behalf of democratic processes (see Michael W. Apple and James A. Beane, *Democratic Schools*).

Consolidation of schools occurred despite the warning issued, in 1939, by the American Association of School Administrators in Schools in Small Communities:

> *keep the schools and the government of the schools close to the people, so that the citizens generally, including the parents and taxpayers, may know what their schools are doing, and may have an effective voice in the school program. The relationship of the schools to the natural community and the closeness of the school to the people are of first-rate educational significance and are not to be sacrificed in the interest of 'efficiency.' If such a sacrifice is made to establish economical districts, we will find in a generation that something of deep significance which money cannot buy has been destroyed.*[35]

It is possible that local schools and rural communities will thrive once again as concerned citizens exert more influence in the democratic process to determine the survival of small schools and the viability of rural communities. Through direct involvement in local institutions such as community schools, we may resurrect community identity which was so closely tied to the local school. In rural (and urban) areas, there are people who are once again participating in grass-roots democracy. It is the commitment of these empowered citizens that helps shape local policy to reflect that which is "best and wisest" for its children. The Rural Challenge is, in effect, an attempt to reaffirm these democratic principles and the value of local place.

# Notes

[1] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 235

[2] Ibid., p. 113.

[3] Ibid., p. 109.

[4] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York: The Free Press/Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), p. 11.

[5] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School,* p. 74.

[6] Such a history doesn't always bring to everyone fond memories. It is, however, a good example of our often expressed phrase — "democracy is very messy."

[7] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School,* p. 45.

[8] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History* , p. 6.

[9] Ibid., p. 28.

[10] Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 24.

[11] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History*, p. 7.

[12] Hicks, John D., "Our Own Middle West 1900-1940," in Nichols, Jeannette P. & Randall, J. G. (eds.), *Democracy in the Middle West ,1840-1940* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, Inc.), p. 98.

[13] Ibid., p. 142.

[14] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School,* p. 60.

[15] Ibid., p. 52.

[16] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History*. p. 10.

[17] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School*, p. 58.

[18] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History*. p. 17.

[19] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School,* p. 190-191.

[20] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History*, p. 254.

[21] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School,* p. 35-36.

[22] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History*, p. 349.

[23] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School,* p. 69.

[24] Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1991) p. 45.

[25] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School*, p. 107.

[26] Ibid., p. 110.

[27] While we worry about the effects of charter schools as public policy, some of the impetus at various local levels for creating charter schools is clearly understandable.

[28] Ray Budde, *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept. 1996, Volume 78, Number 1. p. 72.

[29] Tony Wagner, "School Choice to What End?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept. 1996, Volume 78, Number 1, p. 71.

[30] *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1996, Volume 78, Number 1. p. 55.

[31] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School,* p. 189.

[32] Robert L. Church & Michael W. Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History*. p. 261.

[33] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School*, p. 83.

[34] Ibid., p. 3.

[35] Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools*, p. 44.

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# ON LIVING WELL IN OUR PLACE:
## Earlier Rural Reform Movements

**Julie G. Canniff**

## Introduction

The Annenberg Rural Challenge, begun in 1995, seeks to revitalize rural schools and communities. It has developed around some of the following ideas: support for the value, the efficacy of small schools; a belief that in such settings students become well known and the educational exchange is more personalized, thus enhancing learning; that ties to parents can be more productive and local people more connected; that a good and enriching life is possible in rural communities; that schools and communities can assume greater, more reciprocal responsibility for social and economic revitalization.

There have, however, been earlier efforts with similar aims. This essay pursues two efforts which are worth thinking about, which grew up in times of change, that have some important parallels to the work of the Rural Challenge. They may prove enlightening.

## American Rural Life Reform Movements:
### The Country Life Movement 1900 - 1920

> *The transformations through which the United States is passing in our own day are so profound that... we are witnessing the birth of a new nation in America ... These changes are in part the result of... the age of steam production and large scale industry, and of the closing of the colonization of the West... The age of free competition of individuals for the unpossessed resources of the nation is nearing its end.* [1]

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Profound change has been a part of America's rural landscapes and their institutions since the early 1900s. Social reform movements arose from the need to reconcile the transformation wrought by modern industrial America with the simpler, more intimate way of life in small towns and on the farms. The Country Life Movement was the first in a long series of national movements seeking to reclaim the values of America's democratic heritage through a redirection of the culture's central institutions – families, schools, churches, economic, and civic organizations. Reformers in the early part of the twentieth century believed that a new commitment to rural places and a respect for rural livelihoods was essential to the preservation of a modern civilization.

## History

At the beginning of the century Theodore Roosevelt's presidency ushered in the new millennium almost simultaneously with the closing of the western frontier. The first decade of the twentieth century was characterized by a rapidly developing 'industrial class' and cities became not only destination places for the jobless, but centers of business, culture, and opportunity. Capital in the form of monetary exchange became the standard by which wealth was defined and sought. The prestige of the farmer and the clergy declined while "Captains of Industry" came to dominate the social and political landscape.

> *The masters of industry... regard themselves as pioneers under changed conditions carrying on the old work of developing the natural resources of the nation... to expand the horizon of the nation's activity and to extend the scope of their dominion.* [2]

The period from 1900 to 1914 was one of great prosperity for progressive Western and Midwestern farmers and with that prosperity they modernized their farms by introducing new labor-saving equipment, and scientific practices. They also wielded significant political power at the state and federal levels.[3] By contrast, in the Northeast and the South, because of the cost of mechanization and the lure of better paying jobs in the cities, whole families migrated, renting their farms to new immigrants or abandoning homes and land altogether. The combination of mechanization and migration eventually forced the consolidation of small family farms all across the nation into large, and very often corporate agribusinesses.

Roosevelt's presidency was synonymous with the Age of Progressivism. Progressive thinkers such as Gifford Pinchot persuaded Roosevelt to focus attention and resources on conserving America's natural resources, particularly the forests, and undertake scientific programs of land and water reclamation. Pinchot was joined by academicians and politicians who recognized that the closing of the western frontier meant that natural resources from now on would have to be "managed" in order to provide enough food for a growing population, and still secure areas of wilderness so fundamental to America's spirit.

Progressive ideas were founded on applying scientific knowledge and techniques to everything from sanitation to elementary education. The ideas were taken up by social reformers and implemented first in fighting the problems of the cities – overpopulation, housing, lack of education and work skills, immigration, and disease. But a few experts urged Roosevelt to undertake rural reform as well. In the final year of his presidency, he responded to a report from Sir Horace Plunkett, a close advisor and active agricultural reformer in Ireland. Plunkett pointed out that the problems of rural America could be resolved in three ways: make farmers better business people; build up the social and intellectual life in rural areas; and redirect the education of farmers and their children toward modern scientific agricultural practices. [4] He persuaded Roosevelt that a national reform movement was needed to accomplish these three goals which, if successful, would make farmers more competitive with industry, and stem the flow of 'native stock' to the cities.

On Plunkett's advice, Roosevelt formed the Commission on Country Life and sought as its chairman, agriculturalist, academician and philosopher Liberty Hyde Bailey of Cornell University.[5] Bailey's ardent advocacy of the American farmer had long stressed that the core of American civilization rested in small farms and communities. He noted:

> *Civilization oscillates between two poles. At the one extreme is the so-called laboring class and at the other are the syndicated and corporate and monopolized interests... between these two poles is the great agricultural class which is the natural balance-force or the middle wheel of society. These people are steady, conservative, abide by the law and are a controlling element in our social structure.* [6]

Historian Richard Hofstadter coined the phrase "agricultural fundamentalism" to refer to this spiritualization of country life which placed the farmer and the farm at the nation's moral and civic center, "...the farmer is the incarnation of the honest, healthy and happy man; farming is important for its moral and civic influences on the nation."[7] Roosevelt eagerly played this expressive chord within the American psyche to focus national attention on the revitalization of rural America, suggesting:

> *Our civilization rests at bottom on the wholesomeness, the attractiveness and the completeness as well as the prosperity of life in the country. The men and women on the farms stand for what is fundamentally best and most needed in our American life.*[8]

## Educators and Philosophers

The Country Life reformers, fearing the eclipse of the country in favor of urban values, advocated changes to country life which stressed organization and cooperation, standardization, and mechanization. Philosopher/scholars such as Liberty Hyde Bailey, Sir Horace Plunkett, Dr. Joseph Hart, Mabel Carney, Elwood Cubberley, and John Dewey introduced both spiritual and pragmatic ideas of community, democracy and place-based education into the discussion. The life of the open country was to be spiritualized and modernized – the instrument for both was education. Just as urban progressive educators were turning to education to 'Americanize' the waves of immigrant children entering the public schools, so rural progressives turned to education as the panacea for resolving the problems of farm-life.

### Liberty Hyde Bailey

Liberty Hyde Bailey, Dean of Cornell's College of Agriculture from 1903 to 1913, is widely considered to be the father and prophet of the Country Life Movement. He was among the first to write about the 'holy earth' as the consummate foundation upon which the American civilization was based, and as early as 1896 he was calling for the need to study the problems of the open country. Bailey believed strongly that the revitalization of the open country could only be accomplished by first establishing a new social order which was rooted in the spiritual values of the land.

> *As the people progress in evolution, the public mind becomes constantly more sensitive to the conditions in which we live and the appeal to the spiritual satisfaction of life constantly becomes stronger. Not only shall the physical needs of life be met but the earth will constantly be made a more satisfactory place in which to live.... We have been living in a get-rich-quick age. Persons have wanted to make fortunes. Our business enterprises are organized with that end in view. Persons are now asking how they may live a satisfactory life rather than placing the whole emphasis on the financial turnover of a business. There is greater need of more good farmers than of millionaires.* [9]

Bailey's solution was to revitalize the farm and farm community through modernizing its central institutions – family life through intellectual and cultural opportunities, the school and church through redirected curricula and the social gospel, and the community through cooperative organizations and improved communication with the larger world. Education and cooperation were central to the enterprise and if implemented according to scientific principles, he believed "ignorant, selfish individualism" would be eliminated.

Most, if not all, of Bailey's ideas were incorporated into the Country Life Movement. The following were central tenets:

- *One does not act rightly toward one's fellows if one does not know how to act rightly toward the earth – thus more people should own their own land.*

- *Society moves between two poles – syndicated and corporate interests, and the laboring class. Both are by nature lawless. Only the landed class and the working classes are stable.*

- *Man's existence lies beyond the ledger; life is not a pocketbook... life requires spiritual satisfactions and art. Great gains come from service to one's fellow man and from making something for the love of it.*

- *No person should grow up without definite training for public service.*

- *Cooperation is everything that develops the common commercial, intellectual,* *recreative and spiritual interests of the rural people.*

- *A viable religion should be based on constructive work in society rather than in doctrines.*[10]

But it was Bailey's philosophy about schooling, from his position as a scientist and an educator, that was so radical. Inspired by the accounts of Danish Folk Schools and Dewey's progressive schools, Bailey insisted that the basic function of a rural school is to fit rural pupils for country life. However, young people were not the only beneficiaries of his enlightened pedagogy; Bailey also believed that education was the single means by which farmers and their wives would develop the farm community into a vital and compelling place to live and work. He saw in schools and communities a natural reciprocity.

**Sir Horace Plunkett**

Plunkett brought a unique perspective to America's rural problems. Born to wealth, highly educated and a long-time politician, Plunkett captured Roosevelt's attention during a number of discussions about American agriculture and its problems. Having studied in great depth the causes and consequences of Ireland's land problems, as well as having considerable experience with cooperatives, Plunkett's insights about the needs of America's farmers carried great weight with the President.

Plunkett's view of farming was to make the farmer competitive with industry – this meant organizing and combining resources to protect one's markets and eliminate the middleman. "Farming is a business and through scientific practices, increased credit and organizing for their economic power, they would increase their income and thus solve their social problems."[11] In order to implement modern business practices, Plunkett believed the farmer and his wife had to be re-educated. While education was being redirected to "develop in the country the things of the country," Plunkett also insisted that the farmer take advantage of education to enrich the mind and the spirit. By attending to all three of these goals simultaneously, Plunkett was convinced that rural areas could create sufficient counter-attractions to urban life to stay the exodus from the land.[12]

**Theodore Roosevelt**

Theodore Roosevelt contributed his own ideas to the country life movement, which though influenced by his close advisors, were part of his philosophy of democracy. He stood between Jefferson and Hamilton in his beliefs that the small land holder, the homesteader, was the economic and social core of the nation. He celebrated the self-reliant, rugged individualist farmer who represented the strong moral fiber of the country. At the same time, he sought to solve the problems of the farm through bigger government programs and expanded educational institutions - in other words an expanded national government.

A thread of racism was deeply woven into Roosevelt's perception of the rural life problem. He urgently sought to maintain the native American (European) stock (versus immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, African Americans and Mexican-Americans) as perpetual landowners. Roosevelt, like many of his contemporaries, considered that the real wealth of the country was in the land, and that there was a need to keep landowners on the land. They believed that as superior native stock was replaced by inferior, uneducated tenant farmers, the very foundations of American democracy would be in danger.

> *... if there is one lesson taught by history, it is that the permanent greatness of any state must ultimately depend more upon the character of its country population than upon anything else. No growth of cities, no growth of wealth can make up for loss in either the number or the character of the farming population.*[13]

> *Tenant farming is on the increase and is now characterized by a different kind of people. Earlier immigrants were German, English, Scot and Scandinavian – from lands where general education and a relatively high degree of civilization prevailed. These were intelligent, thrifty and law abiding people.*[14]

> *The cornerstone of every successful rural social order is that land shall be tilled by those who own and cherish it... solving the farm problem means holding landowners in the country.*[15]

## Ideas and Themes

The principal impetus of the country life movement was the need to reconcile the traditional values of the country with the modern ambitions of the city.

> *If we have very highly developed persons in the city, we have very rugged persons in the country. If the sense of brotherhood is highly evolved in the city, individualism is strongly expressed in the country. If the world-movement appeals to men in the city, local attachments have great power with men in the country. If commercial consolidation and organization are characteristic of the city, the economic separateness of the man or family is highly marked in the country.*[16]

The Commission on Country Life was created at a time when Americans were both fascinated and repelled by the modern metropolis. The generation which had survived the economic panics of 1873 and 1886 was nostalgic for the simple traditions of agrarian life, consequently, the publicity around the Commission's work fueled a national obsession with rural life. Some of the issues they identified included the loss of deeply spiritual values representative of an agrarian civilization, concerns about massive migration to the cities, already overcrowded, and fears that loss of superior native stock on American farms would jeopardize the agricultural productivity essential for a growing population. Businessmen in small towns as well as the cities also needed the revenue from prosperous farm families to stimulate the national economy. It was in everyone's best interest to modernize rural areas and their institutions thereby sustaining rural communities at the economic and social levels of urban centers.

The philosophy of the Country Life Movement which emerged to resolve these issues incorporated three themes: Community Sustainability, Redirected Community Institutions, and Participatory Democracy:

### Community Sustainability

For the most part Country Life scholars were writing about sustaining the "family farm" as a viable economic and socially progressive unit. "It is commonly thought that community life... means living together in centers or villages. I conceive that it is possible to develop a very effective community mind whilst the persons remain on their farms."[17] The small town was characterized as both serving and exploiting the farmer. It provided a centralized location for such essential institutions as banks and credit unions, the postal service, schools, churches, libraries and cultural organizations, while at the same time it controlled the means of distribution for farm products and communication with the world outside village boundaries.

> *In America the town dominates the country and the machinery of distribution is owned by the businessmen of the towns – it is worked by them in their own interests... they take from unorganized producers and consumers the full business value of the service they render.*[18]
>
> *Large experiments in politics and in cooperative distribution, ventures requiring knowledge, courage and imagination, do originate in the West and Middle west, but they are not of the towns. They are of the farmers. If these heresies are supported by the townsmen it is only by occasional teachers, doctors, lawyers, the labor unions, and workmen... who are punished by being mocked as 'cranks.' The editor and the rector preach at them.* [19]

Bailey and others stressed that the central purpose of the reforms was to "raise up" the living for people whose families had lived for generations on the farms. This was not to be confused with a popular trend among affluent suburbanites who were beginning to invest in country homes in order to escape from the stresses of the city, "... we must be careful not to confuse suburbanism and gardening with country life. To have any effect on rural development a person must become a real part and parcel of the country life."[20]

Joseph Hart in *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities* (1914) defined what he and other rural life reformers considered to be the elements of a positive community spirit:

> *1. The physical resources of the community will condition the life and action of the child.*
>
> *2. The older beings of the community will determine the social world within which the child grows to maturity and responsibility.*
>
> *3. Economic relationships and the industrial life will determine the way a child thinks, talks as well as the range of his opportunities and the bent of his common interests.*
>
> *4. The health of the community in hygiene and sanitation will determine the efficiency and energy of the growing child.*

> *5. The child will feed upon traditions, folktales, heroic stories, desires, prejudices, hatreds, feuds and friendships of the community.*
>
> *6. The community government will control and manipulate his chances of life.*
>
> *7. The home will be a place of beauty, life and culture.*
>
> *8. Wholesome recreation and play will restore strength spent in work and prepare him for serious doings of mature years.*

The report of the Country Life Commission cited a number of deficiencies which threatened community sustainability including a lack of knowledge of the local regions, a lack of training in school for country life , lack of good highways, bank credit and health practices, and the need of well prepared, new leaders.[21]

Reformers identified three strategies for sustaining rural communities: cooperation, education, and the application of modern scientific practices. Bailey, Plunkett, Roosevelt, Carney, Cubberley and many others confirmed that physical, social and intellectual isolation lay at the heart of many rural life problems. According to them, isolation bred provincialism which made rural people wary of modern, progressive ideas.

> *... the farmer is everywhere the most conservative and individualistic of human beings. He dislikes changes in his methods and venerates those which have come down to him from his fathers' fathers. Whatever else he may waste, these traditions he conserves.*[22]

The competitor to the individual farmer was the corporation which had access not only to more raw materials, but wider markets. As a corporate entity it was efficient and effective; it could wield power in ways the individual could not. Rural reformers thus denounced the isolated farmer and urged him to organize. Plunkett wrote that the key to better business in rural areas was the agricultural and/or business cooperative which could exert political influence on government and other power structures.

> *... the work will mainly be that of active organization and will be concentrated on the business methods of farmers... the first step toward a general reconstruction of country life is cooperation.*[23]

It is a curious paradox that the rural life reformers who believed so strongly in farming as a way of life exemplified by individualism and self-sufficiency were at the same time pushing them to organize themselves into modern businesses. Roosevelt, in fact, believed the Country Life Movement should accomplish this transformation.

> *The farmer must not lose his independence, his initiative, his rugged self-reliance, yet he must learn to work in the heartiest cooperation with his fellows... a single farmer today is no match for the corporations, railroads and business enterprises with which he must deal. Only through cooperative organizations can our farmers*

> *build up their strength. A balance of government action and self-help is the answer.*[24]

Bailey believed that organization and cooperation would also sustain the community spirit. He was convinced that the Country Life Movement could create rural organizations which, "could supply as completely as the city the four great requirements of man, health, education, occupation and society."[25] Farmers eventually came to accept the need for organization, particularly around purchasing and marketing cooperatives; they organized credit unions, standardized work hours, and invested in cooperatively-owned machinery for processing crops.

**Redirected Institutions**

The central theme of the Country Life Movement, as well as a strategy for community sustainability, was education. Virtually all of the writers and philosophers of the Movement stressed that education should prepare students for life - particularly life in the open country. Thus, all life experiences qualified as education and the community was understood to be a central educational environment. Bailey argued that "Education is not confined to the institution known as schools. It is the result of all experiences and all training."[26] Bailey's master plan for the redirected school incorporated three elements of effective education which he, and others, believed would transform education in general and the rural schools in particular. An effective education should

- *develop out of personal experience,*
- *relate these experiences to a vocation or to the pupil's part in life, and*
- *ensure that every school should be the natural expression of its community.*

Joseph K. Hart, rural sociologist and educator at the University of Washington, reminded his students that the community is the "true educational institution." Through the local institutions of kinship, church, school, library, economic and political organizations,

> *... all education was practical because it was wrought out of the very life of the community; thorough because the tests were those of life itself and the active world passed upon one's qualification; moral because it was the community's own life and purpose wrought into the life and purpose of the maturing child. Such education was complete only when the child was thoroughly equipped with the skill and desire to continue the traditions and interests of the community.*[27]

In the minds of the reformers, the first twelve years of education should prepare the young person to live well in his or her local environment; the farmer needed training and instruction to be able to apply the teachings of modern science to the practice of farming and modern economics to the running of a business; the farm wife needed training and instruction to be able to run an efficient, and hygienically sound household. In order to meet these demands, scholars in state universities offered advice on everything from the proper type of public school building, to the content of curriculum, to the preparation of country teachers. The same universities, utilizing their extension education divisions, began placing agents in rural communities throughout the country. It wasn't long before "agricultural demonstration work became one of the chief devices used by reformers to promote their program of changes."[28]

But it was the public schools which became the focus of the Country Life Movement. Elwood Cubberley, an outspoken and opinionated writer, placed the success of the rural life reform squarely on the rural school. He echoed others who denigrated the memorization of facts and learning from books as ineffective and unlikely to adapt a man or woman for life in the country. Cubberley's goals for the redirected school were far more specific than Bailey's.

> *1. The rural school must abandon its city ideals and standards.*
>
> *2. The school must develop its instruction with reference to the environment, local interests and needs.*
>
> *3. Put pupils into sympathetic touch with the rural life around them.*
>
> *4. Emphasize vocations of the home and farm which is the natural destiny of the students.*
>
> *5. Reach out to the life of the community and influence it for good*[29].

Rural life philosophers extolled the virtues of the rural school pointing out the advantages of smallness, simplicity and its closeness to the actual conditions of the people.

> *... because the school was the last of the social institutions developed to meet a social need, it would have been the part of wisdom for the school to be modest and to learn to adapt itself to the changing conditions in the life of the community, striving ever to do those things which were not being done by some other element of the community life.*[30]

They referred to the public school as "a natural organic center where persons may naturally meet and where a real neighborhood interest exists"[31] and "a chief immediate agency for up-building the country community."[32] The task of the rural school is to "make a strong binding union of home and school, the farm methods and the school methods."[33]

Nonetheless, national education associations and commissions, under pressure from the economic sector, began a national program of setting standards as to graded classes, curriculum, graduation requirements, the length of the school year, the competence and preparation of teachers, and universal testing arrangements. Cubberley and others countered with demands for school standards which reflected the conditions of rural communities rather than standards followed by urban school districts. They emphasized that the curriculum should be related to agricultural and home science and should determine the means by which the school prepared a student to take his or her place in the farm economy. The reformers were especially critical of the teachers who came to rural areas and the pedagogy they imposed on their students. Cubberley insisted that:

> *The teachers, trained in city schools, did nothing to make the rural school minister to the needs of rural life... the teacher developed little interest in the rural community and the community lost interest in the teacher and the school.*[34]
>
> *The uniform textbooks were written primarily for the city child... the graded course of study superimposed from above was a city course of study ... the ideals of the school are city and professional in type... city educated and trained teachers overemphasize the affairs of the city.*[35]

Bailey, in particular, stressed the need to "teach the objects and affairs of the local environment." Some of his thoughts about the actual work of public schools include:

> *We must outgrow the sit-still and keep-still method of school work. I want to see our country school houses without screwed-down seats and to see the children put to work with tools, soils, plants and problems.*[36]
>
> *A child does not learn much when he is silent and inactive. Out of this work will grow the necessity of learning to read, and figure and draw.*[37]
>
> *We over-emphasize the importance of mere verbal accuracy and breed in our pupils a depressing fear of making mistakes.*[38]
>
> *The habit of self-expression in song and music needs much to be encouraged in home, school, grange and church... drama should represent the harvest, the seasons, the history and traditions of the neighborhood or region.*[39]
>
> *The study of history should result in better local civic ideas.*[40]
>
> *The principles of number are everywhere the same; but there is no reason why practice problems should not have local application... when the child takes home a math problem that has application to the daily life there is a different attitude on the part of the parents to the problem and to the school.*[41]
>
> *If geography is taught let it be taught in terms of the environment... we are now interesting the child in the earth on which he stands and as his mind grows we take him out to the larger view.*[42]
>
> *There is as much culture in the study of beet roots as in the study of Greek roots.*[43]

William Bowers suggests that while scholars like Bailey, Carney, Foght and Hart promoted radical and progressive new theories tailored to the rural school, in reality many of the farmers actively opposed efforts to change the schools. Arguing that it was reading and writing which "spoiled" their children for a life working on the farm, some farmers declared that better education would be gained through direct experience in laboring on the farm. According to Bowers, other farmers complained about the small one-room schools and the education their children were (not) getting. For them, education was meant to help their children pursue many different options in life. Still others fiercely resisted the national movement to consolidate small schools into large, anonymous districts far from local farms and homes.[44]

The second and equally important institution which came under scrutiny during the rural reform movement was the church. In 1911, Elwood Cubberley observed at the Michigan Rural Life Conference that, "there were 10,000 dead rural churches in Illinois, 10,000 more about to die and 500 already abandoned." He, and others, laid the blame for this condition on the rural church's self-righteous piety and absorption with irrelevant dogma. A church which continued to repress the young for sin and corruption instead of providing leadership and guidance in social service was, reformers argued, a church unwilling to adapt to modern times. Bailey accused the country church, much like the country school, of being stultifyingly orthodox and unconcerned with the vital affairs of the community.

> *The rural church has no organic connection with the life of the community, in this regard, being worse off than the school. It needs spiritualizing... why not make a country church a social center, letting it stand for good works in everything that interests the community and placing it in some direct relation to vocation.*[45]

Those who affirmed Bailey's belief in the need to spiritualize all country institutions, faulted the church for viewing religion as something external and apart from daily life. If the church were sufficiently aligned with needs and concerns in the community, it would, they suggested, provide the ideals which inspired leadership. Those who tended toward pragmatic ideas, focused on the preparation of ministers for rural churches much as they demanded similar preparation for rural teachers. Ministerial colleges and seminaries were exhorted to unite with normal schools and departments of agriculture to instruct the future clergymen in rural problems and the way of life in the country. Sir Horace Plunkett believed that a clergy educated in the social and economic conditions of the country would take a leadership role in supporting economic cooperatives. The Commission on Country life stated, "... the country pastor must know the difficulties the farmer has to face, some of the scientific revelations of agriculture and the fundamental social problems of the life of the open country.[46]

Perhaps the single greatest threat to the small country church as well as the small country school was the so-called 'intellectual revolution' which canonized the essence and application of modern science. More than anything else, the obsession with scientific knowledge and principles contributed to the decline of the spiritual in country life. Science represented progress and certainty, not tradition and superstition. The science of economics preached organization, efficiency and market strategies. The clergy, once revered as men of power and prestige, were overshadowed by the successful entrepreneur. The reformers embraced the gospel of competition which exhorted the ambitious to think and plan with an urban frame of mind.

## Consolidation

In spite of their commitment to revitalizing rural institutions, virtually all Country Life reformers advocated consolidating schools and federating churches in order to conserve resources and improve professionalism (though they would have been shocked by the kind of consolidation that developed in the middle decade of the 20th century). In the early 1900s one room schools and tiny churches, the sentinals of rural life, could be found wherever there was a cluster of farms. Initially, the consolidation movement advocated closing one room schools which served one or two farm families and transporting the students into more centrally located small towns. Roosevelt's policy of developing an extensive rural road system facilitated this objective and the small district school was created to accommodate farm children along with town children.

> *The consolidated school is distinctly the product of evolution in country life affairs... it has developed into an effective instrument for redirecting and revitalizing country life. Almost unlimited are the opportunities for service in the field of community building, cooperation and education in the open country with the consolidated school as the solid basis. The solution of rural problems must grow out of the soil , it will not come from country life offices in city skyscrapers.*[47]

Protestant denominations began to follow suit and consolidated small churches in towns and in some cases consolidated different denominations under one federated church.

The Country Life reformers believed that consolidation would, in fact, work to their purposes by enabling towns to build a modern, scientifically designed school complete with teachers and administrators trained in agricultural and home sciences. "...the best administrative unit for the rural school is the township unit – the small local district unit is too subject to partisanship, lack of funding and professionalism."[48] The one room, multigraded elementary school would be transformed into a larger age-graded school including both primary and secondary levels. The redirected curriculum as noted above, would begin by teaching basic academic knowledge and end by incorporating agriculture and nature study into every content area. For farm children, the consolidated school provided the first opportunity for them to attend a high school in which they would have opportunities to explore art, athletics, music, manual training, agricultural and domestic science.

But above all, the consolidated (town) school would become the heart and center of the country community.

> *The consolidated school builds up the country community. It defines community boundaries and establishes a community sense. It overcomes petty jealousies, swallows small differences, enlarges and intensifies the community idea into something significant... To it will turn the old man and the kindergarten child. Tired mothers will visit it and learn how to prevent their weariness; discouraged farmers will call upon it and absorb the courage of its new science. Young people will come because it reflects life's best inspiration and hope.*[49]

Bailey believed, however, that there was a danger in centralizing interests too far from the family farms and that drawing young people off the farms and into the towns could set the stage for a future exodus to the cities. Nonetheless, Bowers writes that ninety-five percent of the farmers who gave consolidated town schools a fair trial endorsed them. "...they promised better agricultural research, higher salaries, improved facilities and ultimately the consolidated school would build up the community by drawing the surrounding farm population together."[50]

**Participatory Democracy**

The final theme that characterized the Country Life Movement was a re-commitment to the concept of participatory democracy. As indicated above, rural life writers universally advocated organization, cooperation, and consolidation for farm businesses, social groups and local institutions. In order to counter the impression that they were promoting socialist ideas, most of them also directed the public's attention to the authentic practice of democratic principles.

> *The atmosphere in which socialism of the predatory kind can grow up does not exist among a prosperous farming community... I suggest that the orderly and safe progress of democracy demands a strong agricultural population... where husbandmen and men of small fortune predominate, government will be guided by law.*[51]

If the city represented lawless corporate greed, then the country exemplified orderly, direct democracy. The individualistic and self-reliant farmer became the model for the honest and responsible citizen whose common sense and practical knowledge was needed in an age of exploitation and ambition.

Once again, the reformers turned to education as a means by which rural people could be instructed in the exercise of their civic responsibilities. Bailey in particular threw his considerable influence behind the formation of farmer's institutes, legislative clubs, study groups and extension service education – anything that would educate and inspire rural people to act on their behalf for rural progress.

> *Every movement that tends to weaken local responsibility and initiative is a distinct menace to the people. Whenever the people are taught to look beyond their own institutions to federal institutions, they lose the opportunity and power to help themselves.*[52]

The Country Life Commission also called for the cultivation of new leaders among the youth.

> *The great need everywhere is new and young leadership and the Commission desires to make an appeal to all young men and women who love the open country to consider this field when determining their careers... we need young people who will live in the open country as permanent residents who while developing their own business... will still have unselfish interest in the welfare of their communities.*[53]

The country teacher and rural clergy were held responsible for carrying out this role.

> *The proper role for local professional leadership is to develop lay or farmer leadership. The country teacher, as a leader must teach independence and initiative ... and foster the latent possibilities of men, women and young people and send them to the front as guides and directors.*[54]

> *The need for rural leadership is great and the opportunity for leadership and service belongs to the country teacher and minister... The teacher, because of his influence, can stimulate others into action. He needs to instill in his students a sympathy with country life; training for rural leadership is far more important than a knowledge of subject.*[55]

Bailey, through the Country Life Commission, endorsed the concept of local decision-making for rural communities. Consistent with his belief that local needs and issues were best understood by those who resided in the community, Bailey argued that democracy at the state and federal levels was best served by local leaders.

> *State, national, educational institutions and philanthropists must allow native individuals responsibility and initiative to develop in the man who stands directly on the land. If it is necessary to stimulate enterprise, the effort should lie with the institution or agency nearest to the man and his problem.*[56]

Bailey's strongest belief was that the expert should be "on tap not on top" and responsive to an educated and well informed community.

Plunkett, and those in Roosevelt's administration, took a very different view. They believed that the combined wisdom of agricultural experts in academia, government and private organizations were, in fact, the natural leaders of the rural life reform. They argued that "men who combine gifts of heart and mind to make the higher statesmanship will be found in the city rather than the country; ... they are the natural leaders of the Country Life Movement."[57] .

Roosevelt's 'brain trust' looked to these leaders to provide a "comprehensive knowledge of public affairs, political imagination, and an understanding sympathy with a philosophic insight into the entire life of the community."[58] They perceived that an expansion of the federal and state agencies along with colleges of agriculture and agricultural experiment stations would be able to educate and inform rural communities as to the advantages and disadvantages of their environment.

> *The exercise of a wise advice, stimulus and direction from some central national agency, extending over a series of years could accomplish untold good not only for the open country but for all the people and for our institutions.*[59]

> *The central agency should have a corps of experts to draft the practical details of a rural business combination. It must be in language the hardy rustic understands – fitting the plan to local conditions is a very expert business.*[60]

The connection between agrarian values and an authentic, direct form of democracy would become a central philosophy in subsequent social reform movements. This style of democracy would always be found in small town meetings, civic organizations and the rural way of life. By contrast, *representative democracy* gradually came to dominate national politics. Urban areas, where people with wealth and power could manipulate local, state and national elections, would eventually control the democratic process for all.

**Summary**

According to William Bowers, the Country Life Movement died out in the early 1920s. President Taft, who followed Roosevelt, did not hold the same passion as Roosevelt for agrarian renewal and conservation of natural resources, and virtually all of the Country Life Commission recommendations were ignored during his administration. And the war which soon followed lessened interest in rural reform. Bowers and social historian Samuel Hays, however, hold the prominent writers and philosophers of the Country Life Movement accountable for the movement's failure to inspire the 'rural uplift' so many of them desired. Bowers states that the impetus for the movement came chiefly from people in the land grant colleges, state and federal departments of agriculture, professionals in education, publishers of farm journals, merchants, bankers, manufacturers, railroad and transport companies, and social reformers. He portrays them as, "young, comfortably middle class, urban, although of rural, Midwestern antecedents, Protestant, and well educated."[61] These individuals, according to Hays, shared a profound confidence in the well educated, experienced expert who was trained to research problems and offer solutions based on rigorous, scientific procedures. Seeing a need for rural areas to remain prosperous and productive, as well as retain bright and competent native Americans on their own farms, these experts saw rural America as a fertile laboratory for their experiments.

The farmers, states Bowers, often looked with suspicion upon these urban reformers whose gospel of agricultural efficiency was loaded with a rationale to conserve natural resources and organize farms into cooperative businesses,

> *One farmer in 1909 estimated that not more than 5% of the farmers of his state were in touch with the state agricultural college and experiment station... . farm organizations described the state agricultural college as a 'cold storage institution of dead languages and useless learning.' They stressed production when the farmers needed better marketing and distribution.*[62]

Farmers in other regions, particularly the Northeast and South, faced very different problems and social situations from those in the West and the Midwest. The Country Life Movement, and particularly the Commission was focused predominantly on farmers and farming communities in the Midwest. Farm journals and local publications printed letters from farmers from other parts of the country who resented experts from urban areas who were perceived to be 'slumming' in the country to offer an 'uplift,'

> *The Maine Farmer (12.26.08) disliked what it termed an 'act of class distinction.'*

> *It was a mistake that the farmer should be singled out as a class for special reformatory work and be held up in the public eye as being in ignominious need of missionary reclamation.*[63]

Angry about increasing federal regulations of resources and of trade, rural communities began to vote against most of the progressive reform; small town businesses aggressively fought against local farmer cooperatives. Resistance to new methods imposed by educated "outsiders" grew and many small towns resisted the movement to consolidate their local schools. The goals to redirect curriculum to reflect local places and to educate students for life in the country were by-passed in favor of standardized content areas and age graded classrooms required by state departments of education. Rural schools did not keep pace with their urban counterparts, and young people continued to look to the cities for opportunities. One Country Life institution, however, did survive and flourish. Bailey's goal to establish the Cooperative Extension Service in departments of state universities was eventually authorized by President Wilson in 1914.

## Canadian Rural Life Reform:

### The Antigonish Movement 1920 - 1950

At the turn of the century, the Canadian Maritimes began to experience debt and foreclosure when the economy shifted from subsistence living to a cash-based system, and corporate industries displaced small businessmen. From 1881 to 1930 more than 600,000 people emigrated from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick to urban areas in Canada and the United States. Improvement in communication and roads accelerated the rural decay making it easy for the young, the ambitious, and the restless to move away. Just as the Country Life Movement was waning in the American Midwest, a small, Catholic university began to introduce its own program of rural life education and economic reform in the small communities and farms of Nova Scotia.[64]

### History

In the early 19th century, immigrants from Scotland and Ireland began to settle in the remote territory of Canada's maritime provinces. They were predominantly Catholic, working-class people whose marginal livelihoods came from small farms and coastal fisheries. One of the first institutions founded in the Diocese of Antigonish, Nova Scotia was a small grammar school . The school eventually grew to become St. Francis Xavier University and in 1853 it became a degree granting college for young men entering the priesthood and the professions and in 1883 it started a college for girls.[65]

In the 1920s, the idea of teaching common people to read and write, much less set up financial institutions in their local towns, was totally foreign to any Maritime university.[66] In 1921, Dr. J.J. Tompkins, president of St. Francis Xavier University at that time, persuaded 51 men (ages 17 to 57) to attend a two month program on the University campus. He called the experiment the People's School; its goals were to practice a "blend of adult education, Christian ethics, and social justice."[67] Tompkins' People's School merged the Wisconsin Idea[68] with the innovative structure of the Danish Folk Schools. He rooted his philosophy in cooperative principles which both emulated a Biblical communitarian vision and an economic competitive strategy committed to improving the lives of the working people in the region.

From 1924 to 1930, small groups of farmers and fishermen attended the study groups at the University which were organized primarily around issues of economics. As the movement grew it added programs for industrial workers from coal-mining towns. In 1931 the University finally committed resources to the founding of an Extension Teaching Department and formally recognized adult education as a part of the curriculum. By 1933 the People's School had launched a course for leadership training in conjunction with the Extension School. The following year, the Carnegie Corporation of New York made a grant of $35,000 to fund the work of the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department which was renewed every year until 1947.

Tompkin's objective was to train young people as Extension Education agents to organize and lead study groups in their own communities. The Extension leaders began to set up a network of study groups which were linked together by common goals: adult education, economic sustainability and participatory democracy. The University, through its Extension agents, delivered information and resources directly to the local towns, far distant from the University campus.

## Educators and Philosophers

### J. J. Tompkins

Tompkins is considered to be the prophet and founder of the Antigonish Movement. Born in Cape Breton Island, he came to St. Francis Xavier University in 1902 and became the Vice President in 1907. He immediately began to transform the university from a small college providing a routine education for the select few able to pay the fees into a nationally recognized university whose programs were directly aligned with the working people of Eastern Nova Scotia.

Tompkins traveled widely in Europe searching for new ideas and educational techniques which led him to study the folk education movement in Denmark. There, he discovered a philosophy about education that stressed the exchange of ideas through conversation – the belief that the deepest truths come not from rote study of classroom texts but from "life's enlightenment." Within the Danish Folk School Tradition, the goal of an enlightened society is to ensure that each person understands his or her own cultural history and traditions before they study the history and traditions of the world's cultures. The mechanism for this educational process was the small study circle where each individual could teach and learn in a dialogue based on mutual respect.[69] Danish folk schools fundamentally trusted the wisdom of ordinary people over and above the highly educated and the elite.

Tompkins spent the rest of his life developing and implementing his own version of these principles in what came to be known as the Antigonish Movement. Even as he was enough of a realist to accept that the university, regardless of its enlightened leadership or its programs, would continue to be the conduit for young graduates to enter the modern world, he labored to change the belief that a university education was a stepping-stone to individual self-advancement and prosperity rather than an opportunity to take one's knowledge back to the people.

In 1923, Tompkins left the university and accepted the position of a parish priest in Canso, a fishing town on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia. Over the course of 25 years, he traded the language of the university for the language of the fisherman, farmer and miner. He passionately believed that if he could "awaken the people they would develop their own leaders, for the leaders were there buried in the debris of a collapsed system."[70] He visited local people in their homes, in the woods, in the boats, in the mines and along the roads. He held mass meetings and arranged dozens of tiny forums. His pedagogy included discussions about their poverty, their economic dependence, and their powerlessness and the external forces which perpetuated the system. He gave them difficult and complex ideas to work through and trusted that the power of those ideas would eventually motivate them to act in their own behalf. Tompkins often stated that "Ideas have hands and feet. They'll go to work for themselves."[71]

### M.M. Coady

In 1927, a Royal Commission was authorized by the government in Ottawa to investigate the social and economic conditions in Nova Scotia. In order to revitalize the region, the Commission recommended that fishermen be organized for group action, that the formation of business cooperatives should be widely encouraged and that a campaign for adult education should be instituted. The government sent Dr. M.M. Coady to carry out the recommendations. Coady, also a native of Cape Breton Island, and cousin to Tompkins, had been teaching at a small school in Cape Breton prior to his appointment.

He began his work in the diocese of Antigonish by forming fishermen's federations and encouraging the development of credit unions and miners unions. After his work for the Ottawa government ended, he was made the director of St. Francis Xavier University. He founded the extension education department at the university and guided the work for many years.

### Ideas and Themes

The philosophy of the Antigonish Movement, as defined and implemented by Tomkins and Coady, was built around improving the lives and the conditions for employment among the common people of the diocese. They recognized that education, whether public or parochial, had always been the escape mechanism whereby the bright, assertive few managed to transform their gifts into professional careers. They focused their attention instead on 'those left behind' and the need to develop economic and social programs that would sustain the farms and villages and stem the flow of families to industrial areas.

> *The Antigonish Movement presented itself to the world as the 'middle way' between the extremities of collectivism and individualism. The Movement was a populist one and it worked from the ground up rather than top down... The genius*

> *of the Antigonish Movement lay in its ability to provide its Catholic constituency with a new, transcendentally-based explanatory framework for life in an industrial society and a non-violent strategy for attaining the 'good and abundant life.'*[72]

> *These leaders have gone down to the fishing hamlets on the Atlantic coast, to the impoverished farmers in the agricultural communities, to the miners in their dreary, dingy homes, preaching a deep and profound gospel of the dignity and ability of the common man. Because this gospel has been presented not as a vague and wishful doctrine but as a cogent and practical plan of action, a great change is taking place.*[73]

The central principles of the Movement were grounded in education for social and economic justice, and the exercise of direct democracy:

- *Democracy stresses the value of cooperation and face to face interaction.*

- *Education must be linked to one's place and the issues inherent in that place.*

- *Schooling must be conducted in small group settings where ideas and strategies lead to direct action.*

The themes of the Antigonish Movement, although emphasizing adult education, can still be organized into the same categories defined by the Country Life Movement: Community Sustainability, Redirected Institutions and Participatory Democracy.

### Community Sustainability

The effect of the industrial revolution in Canada was a shift in emphasis from a village-based, ethnically homogeneous society to a social order that stressed competition, mobility, and individual self-advancement. The introduction of scientific principles which strengthened the move toward a capitalistic, wage-based economy, undermined the interdependence of the traditional Anglo-Scottish communities, and threatened the spiritual security offered by the Catholic church. Tompkins, in particular, believed that the small farming towns and fishing villages embodied an authentic way of life, a deep and rich cultural heritage which was linked to their ethnic traditions and to their religion. He envisioned sustainable communities which contained the material benefits and services that were part of modern society, but did not sacrifice the spiritual values which characterized the culture.

Coady's solution was to build on communitarian principles in place of individualistic enterprise.

> *The masses of the common people must be able at all times to manipulate the forces that control society ... It should be in a free enterprise way which is a group activity - a cooperative effort such as labor unions, cooperative credit and insurance societies, consumer cooperative stores and group activities in the varied fields of service.*[74] *One difficulty in establishing the business life of an old community*

> *upon a cooperative basis is the entrenchment of individual enterprise. It has been done in one way so long that the individualistic method has taken on the sacredness of tradition.*[75]

The leaders of the Movement recognized that business and credit cooperatives were the most effective way for farmers, fishermen and miners to reclaim control over their economic futures. As individuals, they did not have enough power to compete, but as organized groups, they could "... relay back to themselves the new wealth that each creates in proportion as he creates it. It is the instrument of a functional society where goods and services are produced for use and not for profit."[76] Dr. Coady relates the example of a group of 28 coal miners with a combined capital investment of $343 who in 1906 established a consumers' cooperative society in Cape Breton. By 1929 the society was managing four branch stores, a milk pasteurizing plant, a bakery and a tailor shop. The business turnover was $1,730,000 in that year.[77]

### Redirected Institutions

Like the Country Life Movement, the leaders in the Antigonish Movement were university educators. They were also Catholic priests. Their desire to fight the extreme poverty of their region and bring resources and hope to their constituents was not only a product of their religious mission, it was sound, economic common sense.

In their experience, formal education in the region had always been focused on abstract, academic knowledge.

> *We preach and teach in the abstract. We expect the common man to transfer our abstract doctrines into concrete actions. We perpetuate the old educational fallacy that abstract knowledge is sure to transfer to the realm of practical life... we shall prepare man to carry out the idealism that religion teaches.*[78]

The purpose of formal education, particularly at the university level, was to prepare the individual to leave his (or her) community and enter the competitive, professional world.

> *Education is the instrument that unlocks life to any free people. But primary and secondary education has been the escape mechanism by which the bright and vigorous few... got into the higher professions... Education has been an instrument that has created classes in a classless society... we can pick from the masses of people enough to supply business and industry and service professions. The great masses are left behind. The kind of life they are leading does not call for education.*[79]

The Antigonish reformers reasoned that in order to build self-sufficient local communities and provide leadership opportunities for young people, the schooling needed to be oriented to the real-life concerns of those communities. Redirecting the university meant awakening the people socially, culturally and spiritually to the acceptance that their self-reliance and self respect would only be won by gaining control of their economic destiny.

> *Our experience in the Antigonish Movement is that there is more real adult education at the pit-heads, down in the mines, out in the fisherman's shacks, along the wharves and wherever the farmers gather to sit and talk in the evenings than you can get from $100,000 worth of fossilized formal courses. It springs from the hearts and pains of the people.*[80]

As Dr. Coady states, "education is what remains after we forget all we have learned in school."[81] The initial strategy was for an extension worker along with the parish priest, to call a town meeting. The meeting was an exchange between the extension worker and the townspeople in which their specific local problems were related to wider issues of economic and political exploitation.

> *(the mass meeting) has two functions: 1. to break up the existing mind-sets, and 2. to help people make up their minds anew to rebuild themselves and society. It is important that people be shocked out of their complacency to begin an honest search for the truth.*[82]

The redirected schooling began with the premise that every ordinary man and woman was a potential student and every small group of concerned men and women was a potential study group. The curricula would emerge from the discussions of their most pressing problems.

> *Uneducated farmers, fishermen, and miners met by night in their little study groups to talk over what was wrong with themselves and their lot – and what to do about it. Some of them had to learn to read and write before they could begin to take definite action. But they did learn, and they did swing into action.*[83]

From the study club, members moved to community rallies once a month, then a number of communities gathered in area meetings called associated study clubs. Finally they came to an annual conference at the University known as the Rural and Industrial Conference. By the end of 1931, 173 study clubs were underway.

Some of the projects which resulted from this intense educational effort included: lobster canning cooperatives, community boats, a goat milking program, community night school, maritime livestock shipping association, cooperative consumers' stores, a miners union, women's handicrafts, blueberry canning cooperatives, purchasing companies, codfish pickling plant, and most important of all, the local credit union.

At the university, the educational program focused on leadership training. Professors instituted two different training courses which specialized in community organizing and the administration of business cooperatives. The students for these courses came directly from the study clubs and ultimately returned to their communities to serve as teachers and leaders.

The range of topics which study groups examined included, the consumer cooperative movement, the credit union movement, various schemes of social insurance, and the needs and the problems of the common man. Women leaders who attended the training programs introduced the study of homemaking problems, handicrafts, health and rural recreation. In the early 1930s the study clubs began to produce their own instructional materials which were organized and printed as *The Bulletin of the Extension Department*. The different departments included: Education, Economic Studies, Credit Studies, Fishermen's Affairs, The Woman's Page, Labour Forum, and The Farm Study Club. "These departments represented 'the Movement' and were the common source of knowledge and information which all shared."[84]

The impetus for reform which sought to revitalize the education of the Canadian Maritimes, also made an impact on the Catholic church. The leaders at the university believed that once men and women had resolved their most pressing economic needs, they would be able to rededicate themselves to spiritual work. Inspired by the philosophy of Pope Pius XII who emphasized that the church's social program is the more equitable distribution of wealth, parish priests began to redirect the mission of the church to social causes.

**Participatory Democracy**

Harry Boyte in his book, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (1996) reintroduces an old and revered concept of civic life – the commonwealth. His view is that the commonwealth represents the ongoing commitment of residents to work together toward "developing the capacity of communities to problem-solve. As an alternative to conventional "expert" practice, it was counter-cultural in the emerging technocratic world."[85] Boyte's thesis profoundly challenges the idea that the role of 'government' is to deliver services and benefits and the citizens' role is to be a consumer and to vote. Rather, he argues that the work of the commonwealth is the face-to-face experience of identifying and building up the spiritual and material wealth of the community.

The reformers of the Antigonish Movement integrated the ideas of the commonwealth and participatory democracy into their programs. The 'wealth' of the small farming towns, fishing villages, and working-class urban neighborhoods resided in committed, well trained leaders and in the cooperative institutions that guaranteed access to resources for everyone. Coady and his colleagues utilized the passion for democracy already deeply ingrained in the local people and set the university to help mobilize these attitudes. Without leadership, they reasoned, the mass of people would not be able to accomplish the monumental task of rebuilding society and its economic institutions. Without a commitment to work together for common renewal, the forces of competition would divide and separate the rich from the poor, the powerful from the weak. The principles of cooperation, whether for economic survival or political parity, were central to the concept of the commonwealth.

> *The impulse must come from the people if there is to be a move that will recreate and resurrect the [large]dream instead of destroying it. The natural leaders of the people must be developed in their own ranks and must take their places at the head of the march away from centralization and its attendant poverty, dependence and slavery... the change will take place only as the people themselves regain ownership, democratically and intelligently, of those things which they have allowed a system of economic feudalism to take from them.*[86]

### Summary

By the end of the 1940s, the Carnegie Foundation's financial support of the extension program came to an end, and both Tompkins and Coady had died within a few years of one another. Nonetheless, the concept of rural educational reform had matured and expanded to embrace a wider vision. That vision was rooted in the idea of the commonwealth which sought to build up the spiritual and material wealth of society by meeting the needs and concerns of local communities. The tool they used was education, broadly conceived, whereby adults became students of their environment, their history and their economic potential. By educating people, young and old, for real-life situations, they prepared them to acquire some measure of control over their economic futures.

The leaders of the Antigonish Movement practiced their philosophy of taking knowledge to the people. They removed the experts from the university and placed them side-by-side with leaders in small, poor communities. They put the resources of the university in the hands of common people who used them to understand more about their own environments and the potential which existed there. This model of leadership and community development proved to be an enduring one and in some respects has ties to the work of the Rural Challenge.

## Conclusion and Reflections

The Country Life Movement and the Antigonish Movement emerged in response to the needs of common people for economic and educational parity. The emphasis was on revitalizing the whole community through a multiplicity of means, and education was a central component of the revitalization focus. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the cooperative extension departments as well as the public schools provided adults and children with the tools to help their communities become economically viable. Nonetheless, the city remained the standard by which the rural community measured itself, particularly in terms of providing challenging opportunities for the young.

Within thirty years, the abandoned farms and small towns were becoming second or in some cases first homes for affluent middle-class people who were fleeing the cities. In re-populating rural areas, they brought with them the values and expectations of their urban past. Many ran for school board or town selectman; they formed planning and zoning committees and began to shape the destiny of the community, in particular the schools. The schools became the battleground on which newcomers and natives fought for their childen's future. One side favored consolidation and norm-referenced achievement standards; the other side favored the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach to schooling.

The Annenberg Rural Challenge is an heir to these earlier movements. It is well on its way to becoming a post-industrial, turn of the millenium educational reform movement. It hopes to become a model for other school reform initiatives, first by re-committing to the principles of earlier movements: a focus on economic sustainability, creating a pedagogy that uses the community as laboratory and text, engaging parents, congregations, community leaders and local businesses in the day-to-day activities of the school, and most important, developing leadership through direct action on behalf of the community.

In the next four years, the participants in the Annenberg Rural Challenge will be looking for ways to challenge the stereotypes which imply that rural is inferior, backward, or out of touch. Schools and communities will be challenging the myth in which the only way for the ambitious or restless young person to have a successful life is to move to the city. Families and neighbors will be challenging the deeply ingrained cultural model which glorifies the individual who is mobile and unattached. As one young middle-school social studies teacher in Jonesport, Maine put it, "We're still in the short rows, just planting the seeds."

# Notes

[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, "Social Forces in American History," *American Historical Review* (New York, 1911), 217.

[2] Ibid., p. 222.

[3] William Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America 1900-1920* (New York & London: Kennikat Press, National University Publications, 1974).

[4] Sir Horace Plunkett, *The Rural Life Problem of the United States: Notes of an Irish Observer* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912).

[5] According to the report of the Commission on Country Life , the Commissioners had two months in which to accumulate data for this national study on rural life. They were leading academicians, journalists, and public servants. Only two, however, Barett from Georgia, who was president of the Farmers' Cooperative and Educational Union of America, and Henry Wallace, editor of Wallace's Farmer , had any direct connection to farmers. The strategies they used to collect data included sending 550,000 surveys to all of the nation's farmers of which 115,000 were returned and 100,000 were classified and tabulated. The commissioners also held 30 public meetings in 40 major cities across the country, encouraged small towns to hold their own meetings in local schools and libraries and gathered information by personal correspondence and inquiries. Perhaps the most effective method for reporting on the work was the extensive coverage given to the Commission and its report by the nation's newspapers, journals, and magazines. William Bowers, in *The Country Life Movement in America 1900-1920*, states that the farmers rejected the reformers' suggestions that there was a crisis in country life. They argued that if the farmer were given economic justice and a fair shake to make a living, that would take care of the social concerns. Many farmers perceived the Country Life Commissioners as patronizing and condescending because "few of them had actual roots in the workaday rural world. . ." p. 102-105.

[6] Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country Life Movement in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p. 16.

[7] Donald Jerome Tweton, "The Attitudes and Policies of the Theodore Roosevelt Administration Toward American Agriculture," Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1964, p. 32.

[8] The Sixtieth Congress, Senate Document No. 705, "Report of the Country Life Commission," (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), p. 9.

[9] Bailey (1915), op. cit., p. 220 & 205.

[10] Bowers, op. cit., p. 49-57.

[11] Ibid., p. 28-29.

[12] Plunkett, op. cit., p. 130.

[13] The Country Life Commission, op. cit., p. 23.

[14] Elwood Cubberley, *Rural Life and Education: A Study of the Rural-School Problem as a Phase of the Rural-Life Problem* (Boston, New York, Chicago: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), p. 55.

[15] Mabel Carney, *Country Life and the Country School: A Study of the Agencies of Rural Progress and of the Social Relationship of the School to the Country Community* (Chicago: Row, Peterson and Company, 1912), p. 8.

[16] Bailey (1915), op. cit., p. 15.

[17] Ibid., p. 99.

[18] Plunkett, op. cit., p. 93.

[19] Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (New York: Penguin Books, USA, 1920/1980), p. 258.

[20] Bailey (1915), op. cit., p. 24.

[21] The Country Life Commission, op. cit., p. 14-15.

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[22] Plunkett, op. cit., p. 94.
[23] Ibid., p. 160.
[24] Tweton, op. cit., p. 39, 48.
[25] The Country Life Commission, op. cit., p. 49.
[26] Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The State and the Farmer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), p. 135.
[27] Joseph K. Hart, *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), p. 2.
[28] Bowers, op. cit., p. 5.
[29] Cubberley, op. cit., p. 173.
[30] Hart, op. cit., p. 7.
[31] The Country Life Commission, op. cit., p. 54.
[32] Carney, op. cit., p. 14.
[33] Harold Waldsteen Foght, A.M., *The Rural School of the 20th Century: Its Characteristics and Its Problems*, (New York: The Macmillan Company), 1910, p. 14.
[34] Cubberley, op. cit., p. 93.
[35] Ibid., p. 170.
[36] Bailey (1908), op. cit., p. 139.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 138.
[39] Bailey (1915), op. cit., p. 212-213.
[40] Ibid., p. 162.
[41] Bailey (1908), op. cit., p. 161
[42] Ibid., p. 160
[43] Bowers, op. cit., p. 58.
[44] Ibid., p. 108-110.
[45] Bailey (1908), op. cit., p. 132.
[46] The Country Life Commission, op. cit., p. 62.
[47] Hart, op. cit., p. 271.
[48] Foght, op. cit., p. 17.
[49] Carney, op. cit., p. 185-186.
[50] Bowers, op. cit. p. 81.
[51] Plunkett, op. cit., p. 50-51.
[52] Bailey (1908), op. cit., p. 98.
[53] The Country Life Commission, op. cit., p. 65.
[54] Carney, op. cit., p. 322-323.
[55] Cubberley, op. cit., p. 301-302.
[56] Bailey (1908), op. cit., p. 75.
[57] Plunkett, op. cit., p. 154-155.
[58] Ibid.
[59] The Country Life Commission, op. cit., p. 64.
[60] Plunkett, op. cit., p. 161.
[61] Bowers, op. cit., p. 3-4.
[62] Ibid., p. 106.
[63] Tweton, op. cit., p. 133.
[64] I have chosen to relate the Canadian rural reform movement inasmuch as it had close ties to the U.S. Country Life Movement and also has lessons for the current reform movement being encouraged by the Rural Challenge.
[65] Alexander Fraser Laidlaw, *The Campus and the Community: The Global Impact of the Antigonish Movement* (Montreal: Harvest House Ltd., 1961), 58.

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[66] Michael R. Welton and Jim Lotz, "Knowledge For The People: The Origins and Development of the Antigonish Movement," in *Knowledge For the People: The Struggle for Adult Learning in English-Speaking Canada*, No. 18 (Ontario, Canada: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1987), p. 102.

[67] Laidlaw, op. cit., p. 57.

[68] In 1890, the University of Chicago began a program of University Extension Teaching which spread throughout the Midwestern and Eastern United States. The Extension movement reemerged in 1906, according to Canadian historian Alexander Laidlaw, at the University of Wisconsin under the direction of Charles R. Van Hise. "The Wisconsin Idea' was about . . . carrying the University to the homes of the people. It attempts to give them what they need - endeavors to interpret the phraseology of the expert and offers benefits of research to household and workshop, municipality and state" (Laidlaw, p. 51).

[69] Steven M. Borish, *The Land of the Living: The Danish Folk High Schools and Denmark's Nonviolent Path to Modernization* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Press, 1991), p. 167-170.

[70] Bertram Baynes Fowler, *The Lord Helps Those . . . How the People of Nova Scotia are Solving Their Problems Through Cooperation* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1938), p. 21.

[71] Ibid., p. 25.

[72] Welton, op. cit., p. 107-108.

[73] Fowler, op. cit., p. 4.

[74] Laidlaw, op. cit., p. 109.

[75] Moses M. Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny: The Story of the Antigonish Movement of Adult Education Through Economic Cooperation* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1939), p. 25.

[76] Ibid., p. 123.

[77] Ibid., p. 37.

[78] Ibid., p. 149.

[79] Laidlaw, op. cit., p. 100.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Coady, op. cit., p. 31.

[82] Ibid., p. 30.

[83] Fowler, op. cit., p. 14.

[84] Laidlaw, op. cit., p. 81.

[85] Harry C. Boyte and Nancy Kari, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 76.

[86] Fowler, op. cit., p. 178.

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# THE GENIUS OF PLACE[1]

**Ben Williams**

## Place and Community in Education

> *We boast of our system of education, but why stop at schoolmasters and school houses? We are all schoolmasters and our schoolhouse is the universe. To attend chiefly to the desk or schoolhouse, while we neglect the scenery in which it is placed, is absurd."*
>
> *Henry David Thoreau "Huckleberries"*[2]

### The Village as a Learning Environment[3]

Educational historian Lawrence Cremin points out that many scholars of American educational history have mistakenly focused on the beginnings of schools in America as the beginnings of education in America. "The result has been a distorted picture of colonial schooling, one that placed an undue emphasis on schooling. The real question of how colonial Americans educated their children is to project it beyond the school to the real educators of colonial America - *the family, the church, and the print shop . . .* "[4] [emphasis mine].

Members of communities—parents, tradesmen, craftspeople and church members—were the central figures in a decentralized educational structure that taught and developed the citizens, artisans, scholars, architects, smiths, mothers, mid-wives, ministers and fathers that formed the foundation of the early Republic. It is important to remember that American public education has deep roots in a folk tradition, a resonance[5] with subsistence patterns, which integrated the seasonal cycles with community life. This system, basically an outgrowth of informal kin, guild and apprenticeship systems inherited from European village life, was so fractured in the beginning decades of the nineteenth century by the disruptions of immigration and war that more formal schooling

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was undertaken to fill the void left from the destruction of a complex village life. In this form, public education was about teaching and academic knowledge as well as an attempt to formalize and refine kin, clan and community relationships into the pedagogy and curriculum. As Cremin points out, the democratic impulses for the institution of schooling and the development of education as vehicles for social mobility were secondary developments.[6] Institutionalized education at its inception was not then to educate the new citizenry to a better, richer life or even to stimulate progress, both guises it would later take on; it was to fill a familial and instructional void left by the destruction and dissolution of traditional community structures.[7]

Cremin's observation points out not only the informal nature of America's educational roots but also the democratic (collective) aspect of education in America. Education and community were initially intertwined, providing mutual support. Moreover, it was a local concern. Cremin's view places the roots of American public education in collective community needs rather than service to privileged individuals or even disciplinary knowledge. With local control in place, schools worked cooperatively with the local community in developing curriculum and pedagogy around traditional patterns of subsistence and the economics of a resource based system. The on-going effort to nurture or even redevelop an eroding community has been a pivotal goal in American education in its efforts to create viable and sustainable democratic structures.

## Sense of Place

Evidence of place and its direct effects on American education are more difficult to discern. Nonetheless, we can imagine much of the local environment integrated and suffused into the daily life and subsistence patterns of early American communities. Education about place, "a sense of place" accumulated in informal settings, became more a part of the ongoing folk educational process than part of any formal curriculum.[8] Sense of place was a quality that was not so much taught but caught.[9] Place was being integrated into early education in much the same manner as subsistence was integrated into both the land and its cycles and the family and its work and economic patterns.

The strong relationship between patterns of subsistence and education can be seen in the academic calendar which retains vestiges of the agrarian and rural rhythms in the long summer vacation to facilitate harvest and breaks for spring planting. Education was long an adjunct to subsistence. Originally, skills like mathematics, reading and writing were intended to be enhancements of agrarian life rather than alternatives to it.

To a large extent the resonance between education and land and other aspects of rural life were matters of common sense. There were few alternatives and every part of rural economy and life-ways revolved around seasonal changes, migrations and the rhythms of harvest and planting. To add to this, a large portion of North American economic opportunity was resource based and a majority of the republic was rural right up to the turn of the last century. American education grew up in a largely rural environment and naturally reflects many aspects of that relationship.

While much of what we have described up until now had been common sense relationships between community, locale and education, it is clear that a larger recognition of the role of community and to a lesser extent place, did not occur until the radical alteration of American social and economic circumstances at the turn of the last century. Ironically, this more recent recognition of community and its role in education came not out of a celebration of shared goals but out of the widespread alarm about the disintegration of community and the failure of education to cope with the modern condition.

## Progressives: Education and Community

The Progressive era (1880-1920) in America, corresponded to the transition from the largely rural agricultural American society to the modern industrial economy. The census of 1900 marked the first point at which urban populations surpassed rural populations in America.[10] "The response to industrialism" as historian Samuel Hays[11] called it, created a wave of change and upheaval in American community and education. Both livelihood and location were altered for many American migrants and many foreign immigrants forced into a transition from rural life ways to urban industrial patterns in American cities. The foundations of rural life were irrevocably altered and for many "life on the land" became a nostalgic theme in American culture.[12] Meanwhile, while many rural residents migrated into urban areas, a series of programs and organizations grew to bolster fragmented communities and depressed economies of rural areas such as "The Rural Life Movement" championed by Liberty Hyde Bailey and President Theodore Roosevelt.[13] On another tact, the Conservation movement, begun after the American Civil War, took specific interest in American land and landscape, asserting the primacy of open land and a wilderness ethic in American character and democratic traditions.[14]

In the wake of tremendous social upheaval, education, which had evolved with the older more stable social order, was criticized as being inadequate to meet the demands of the new American life. American education was not synchronized with urban life. The curriculum was outdated, the assumptions it made were incorrect and the pedagogical methods were called irrelevant by critics. The length of the school day did not match factory life and urban schedules. Farm families which had developed integrated child care and educational patterns were split apart for much of the day as factory work grew more specialized and demanded centralized organization. Industrial settings were sometimes dangerous and very young children could no longer accompany adults to work. In many cases, economics demanded that more family members earn wages as urban life depended more on a cash rather than subsistence economy. The fact that no one was home when children came home from school meant that the school day, vacation times and particularly summer were construed in urban environments as problems rather than assets. Adolescents of this period, with little to occupy them and nowhere to go but the streets, created a wholly new phenomena called "juvenile delinquency."

## Community as Prescriptive

The time around the turn of the century was a complex period in which people looked towards the new century with a mixture of excitement at the rapidly expanding opportunities and dismay at the increasingly rapid rate of change, dislocation and social strife within modern life. Progressive education was a movement to reform and restructure education towards a new increasingly geographical and socially mobile society. John Dewey exhorted educators to grab on to the opportunity that chang presented rather than bemoan its losses, to use the opportunity to create more flexible and relevant educational systems which would meet the demands of a rapidly evolving society.[15] For Dewey, education and community were forged together into creating a new democracy and community that would carry America into the Twentieth Century.

John Dewey and other progressive educators specifically entwined education and community in a dynamic whole, which would both temper and adapt to change. Dewey looked towards a new culture in America, one that was rich and supportive but also freed from the burdens and barriers created by adherence to traditional culture and religious belief. Community was essential in this composition not only for social and democratic training but as a buffer for the anomie and isolation which were bred by disruption and displacement so common in an increasingly mobile world.

In many areas which were suffering from ills generated by the new industrial order, there was a developing trend towards a sense of community, a prescriptive community. The evolution of the word community mirrored this development. The standard sense of the word linked to place and geography was gradually separated from location and augmented by new, more abstract senses of community and groupings. In the wake of massive dislocations, community became more closely linked to groups organized around an occupation, "brotherhood of railroad workers" or sometimes class, "International Workers of the World" (IWW). Diverse groups such as settlement houses, labor unions and Women's rights advocates used community as a rallying point and tried to regenerate aspects of it in the hopes of creating security, social justice, economic opportunity and voice for their constituents.

Conservationists looked upon the experience of the wilderness and nature as another buffer for the ills of urban life. They, along with historians and social theorists, pointed to the promise of American land and the image of bounty in the American landscape as essential elements sustaining American democratic traditions.[16] Legislation during the Progressive period created not only the National Park system but many state and urban park areas assuring that the experience of nature and wild land was one "for all to enjoy." [17]

The Progressive movement had a strong focus on the idea of community. Education, in a similar way as Cremin described in the early republic, was again called upon by Dewey and others to fill the breech between social classes, to lead children away from their parents' mistakes and forge a new bond to democratic traditions. Education had the unique opportunity to be corrective and curative, if a proper prescription could be developed.

Interestingly, many Progressive educators took a strong interest in developing curriculum that connected both land and life. They used a new emphasis on teaching of problem solving skills and in a pedagogy based on experience to create a broader definition of education. Educators like Lucy Sprague Mitchell, the founder of what became Bank Street College, developed what could be thought of as a curriculum based on a village like conception.[18] Mitchell had her students study geography, history, science, social studies and mathematics locally. Students became acquainted with both the human history and the underlying natural history of their area through their schoolwork. From a clear grounding in the local environment, Mitchell's studies progressed to more abstract topics as students developed interest and interpretative skills.

**Conclusions**

The pendulum has swung a few times over the course of the century towards "back to the land" movements which renew interest in rural life and environments. In spite of these movements, however, the trend of education has continued on a track established at the turn of the century that views rural areas as behind, backward and generally in need of a variety of "improvements." Modern education in many areas is a ticket out of a community rather than a celebration of rootedness. The larger geographical sense of community and its implications still linger in our vocabulary and in many areas of the country. But governmental and educational consolidation movements continue to threaten these areas, especially the rural ones which are already marginalized. This situation has been aggravated over the years by any number of issues from price collapses and recessions to increasingly rigid health and safety standards which favor centralized large market operations over diversified small local growers. The situation currently exists that farmers are no longer a statistically significant voice in the electorate according to the U.S. Census Bureau.[19] Perhaps it is time to ask educators some new questions about our relationship to land and local community.

## Schools, Community and a Pedagogy of Place

> *Conquerors are seldom interested in a thoroughgoing discovery of where they really are. Three days after Columbus arrived in the New World, he wrote in his journal, "these islands are very green and fertile and the breezes very soft, and it is possible that there are in them many things of which I do not know because I do not wish to delay in finding gold."*[20]

In his book *The Spiritual Lives of Children*, Robert Coles describes a fragmentation of "real life" and schooling. Coles was interviewing children on the Hopi Reservation in Northern Arizona trying to discover more about their perceptions of spirituality. He chose the local elementary school, a logical point of entry, to stage the interviews. The task of gathering information proved more daunting than first expected. He was having trouble getting any response to his questions. Coles pressed on refining his interview technique and focusing on asking better questions. One day, a local woman who was an aide at the school, overheard one of his interviews and sensing some of his frustration, told him abruptly, "The longer you stay *here, the worse it will get"* [emphasis mine].[21] Interpreting "here" as referring to the fate of his study on the Hopi Reservation, he was confused and bewildered by her response.

Later, when he approached the woman to clarify her statement, he found that "here" referred not to his larger project on the Reservation but actually to the elementary school. "You see, they won't ever want to talk to you about the private events of their lives in this building. They learn how to read and write here; they learn their arithmetic, but that is that."[22]

Coles heeded his would-be advisor and continued his study outside the school. He discovered that children were much more talkative and comfortable outside the school building and spoke articulately about their perceptions and ideas of spiritual life.

While a theme of cultural dominance and sub dominance may play a role in this story (Coles is an Anglo researcher), it also reveals another story more important for our purposes, about schools and the children they serve. It is a story about the dissolving relationship between schools and the communities that surround them. Education is increasingly separated from its locale and disengaged from the life of the local community that it serves. Teachers are often from distant locations and are rarely provided any orientation to place as part of their training.[23] They rarely stay long enough to develop a personal relationship to local landscape and/or culture.

Educator Vito Perrone commented, "Modern high schools 'cover' much and 'discover' very little."[24] Discovery is squeezed between prepackaged units. Students study environment, culture and history from around the globe yet the world right outside the window remains undiscovered, reduced to three day family history units, a visit to a local nature center or a museum for an afternoon. Community involvement in curriculum has narrowed participation to a spending approval process rather than direct involvement with subjects or children. Local communities own educational materials rather than educational process. Apart from the large financial expenditures in buying textbooks and curriculum, are there other costs hidden in these practices? Can schools work in consort with communities to teach children? Qualities like grounding and depth in education cannot be measured. They cannot be bought and they are not in textbooks. Research seems to indicate, however, that when community involvement and support for education are high, students do better academically. Are there ways to both nourish community and prepare students for challenges in the modern society?

### Whole Child, Whole Environment

Ironically, while educators and educational theorists speak more about the benefits of teaching to the "whole child ,"[25] we see from Coles experience that the "whole child" is very rarely the body we see walking through the door of a classroom. Children have already left much of their lives and their being behind before they come to school to learn. The whole child viewed in community terms has multiple roles, and is often woven into a denser fabric. Young people are part of schools, their families, towns, streets, fields and local landscapes.

Looking at schools and their relationship to the communities that surround them on another level, educator David Orr poses a different set of questions. In his essay, "Place and Pedagogy" he observes, "Place is nebulous for educators because to a great extent we are displaced people for whom our immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation, or sacred inspiration."[26] Further, he challenges the current trend asking, "How long does it take for one to learn enough about a place to become an inhabitant and not merely a resident? However one chooses to answer these questions, the lack of sense of place, our 'cult of hopelessness' is endemic, its price is the destruction of small community and a resulting social and ecological degeneracy."[27]

Orr has broader social concerns about education's contribution to increasing mobility and dwindling commitment to locale. He worries about the destruction of community and the possibility of educating for a sustainable future where people have lost their ability to understand place. Orr is concerned with the gradual reduction of democratic processes in a mobile, fast paced world. Without local community, democracy is reduced to results (votes) rather than an ongoing process based on local grassroots action and involvement.

On their surface, Orr's concerns about residents vs. inhabitants and their effects on education seem quite distinct from what Coles' experience showed us about disconnection between schools and communities. Both stories point to larger, seemingly disconnected issues (Coles around student learning and Orr's around community sustainability) that arise if education denies local context. Both point to a growing isolation of schools from community and point towards the negative effects of increasing this isolation. In short, the message in both stories concerns recognition of context and the possible price we may be paying by overlooking what is literally right under our noses. Despite whatever fears exist about parochialism, education is richer for the inclusion of landscape and community. It may, in fact, take a whole village to educate, as well as raise a child.

## Annenburg Rural Challenge

> *Nowadays most places have a double existence, one in reality, in their physical selves, and another in the imaginations of people.*[28]
>
> *Ian Frazier*

A central question of the Annenburg Rural Challenge is to see if education and community can share common benefits by identifying and celebrating their common context. The Rural challenge is built upon the recognition of a community contribution to the common project of educating students and developing citizens.

The Annenburg Rural Challenge has chosen to focus on schools not only because of education's traditional role within rural communities but also the fact that many smaller rural communities are currently in danger of losing their local schools to budget cuts and the continuing movement around school consolidation. The loss of a school often means students being bussed quite far away from their local area. Some will spend upwards of three or four hours a day in transit to and from school. But the loss of a school is larger than time and it involves more than the students.

The Annenburg Rural Challenge sites are actively trying to enliven and sustain their children's education while improving the links between the local community and its schools. Students provide a link integrating education into the sustainability of the town, the local setting, while improving educational opportunity.

The creation of unique, locally developed curriculums of place are tools to create a less fragmented child by grounding both the child and the curriculum in a local context. The effort here is not only to better integrate students lives into their education but also hopefully reintegrate schools into the life of the community. The goal is to help reestablish the fact that education is a shared responsibility among many individuals and institutions.

The Annenburg Rural Challenge sites are using curriculums of place to revitalize rural schools by reintegrating local community contexts and reestablishing local community control. The notion that appreciation of locale and community is not something that can be garnered abstractly or taught exclusively in a school classroom is central to this effort. These are rooted aspects of community and landscape drawn from interaction over time and shared experience. The Rural challenge recognizes these qualities as tremendous assets to education. They create meaning for children and develop the opportunity for deep understanding.

The work of the Rural Challenge also recognizes that many of these rural communities and their ways of life are in jeopardy. The combined effects of economic downturns, particularly in the agricultural economy, have had a profound effect on rural communities and their schools. Other, more subtle shifts like "brain drain," draw away many academically oriented and/or highly motivated students from the local rural community by increased opportunity and possibility for financial gain. These factors and many others have repeatedly taken a toll in leadership in rural settings.

While schools cannot single-handedly correct any of these situations, schools can help to bolster and unify community. They certainly can do what they can to support and celebrate local sources of inspiration and activity which exist. The Rural Challenge, with locally oriented tools like curriculum of place, is trying to reverse the trend towards increasing rootlessness and alienation so dominant in modern society. It gives children the tools to appreciate and garner deep knowledge of their homes.

## Pedagogy of Place/Grounded Pedagogy

> *Before any choice there is this place, which we have not chosen, where the very foundation of our earthly existence and human condition establishes itself. We change places, move, but this is still to look for a place, for this we need as a base to set down Being and realize our possibilities.* [29]
>
> *E. Dardel*

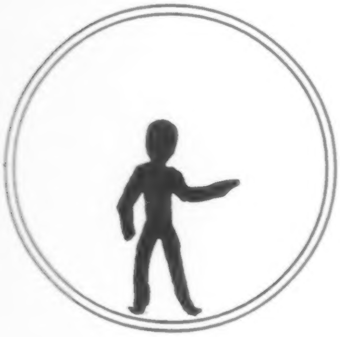
Pedagogy of place is an expression of the growing recognition of context and locale and their unique contributions to the educational project. Circumscribing the curriculum within a limited horizon creates the possibility for direct experience to supplement academic understanding. Using what is local and immediate as a source of curriculum deepens knowledge through the understanding of the familiar and accessible. It increases student understanding and often gives a stronger impetus to apply problem solving skills. There are obvious advantages to a grounded pedagogy where students work at developing deep understandings of the human and natural communities which surround them. The creation of a limited focus augments any number of the newer pedagogoical and curricular efforts such as Constructivist learning and pedagogy, experiential education, environmental education, school-to-work, service learning and many others.

The second level of understanding this work generates is an appreciation of locale and the ways in which diverse communities interact, support and sustain one another. A locale is a landscape constructed of interacting layers of environments and cultures.

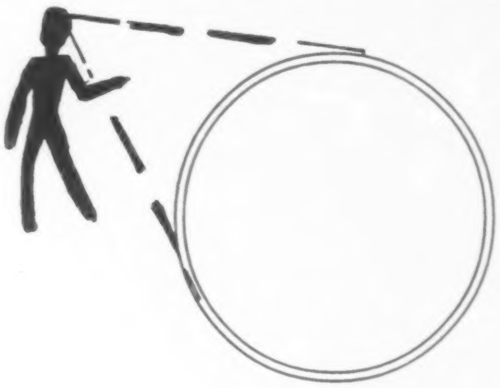
Students are able to understand sustainability and ecological interaction as a part of their lives, well beyond abstract exercises or case studies. The notion of community sustainability in all its dimensions, economic, cultural and ecological can be appreciated as part of a system in which the students as well as the school are embedded.

I present below a grounded learner's viewpoint (figure 1) in contrast to that of an ungrounded learner (Figure 2):

(Figure 1)



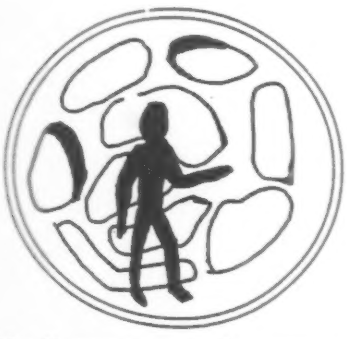
(Figure 2)



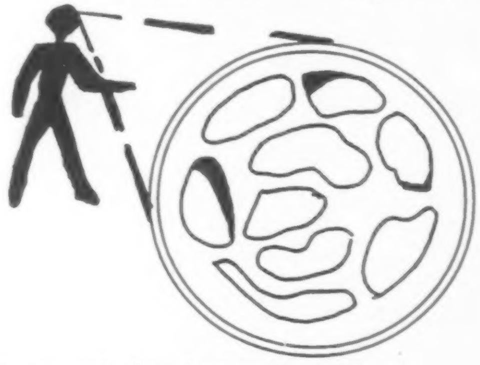
Notice that the grounded student is embedded (located) within a world. The student is active in the system as well as studying the system. The ungrounded view promotes a disconnection. The student is relegated to the role of an observer with no chance to act.

A second set of representations, this time with curriculum added in, might look something like this:

Grounded curriculum (Figure 3):



Ungrounded curriculum (Figure 4):



The lines represent the coverage of any given curriculum in a subject. These providea simplified map of a student within his or her educational process. Again, thegrounded curriculum demands that students understand that learning is an action that has effects on the various communities that surround the school. While this may be a valuable lesson as a cautionary tale, a more valuable benefit is to envision student activity as a productive asset to the community. Modern education is plagued with the idea of progress. It has become increasingly self-referential. In doing so, learning and education seem to have less and less immediate meaning in the lives of students. The object of a pedagogy of place is to recontextualize education locally. The goal is to make education more a preparation for citizenship as well as continuing scholarship.

Grounding pedagogy and curriculum in place gives schools and students a location. Location has psychological and physical dimensions. Once established, a fixed point of reference creates ground and field. These relationships can be described and developed in a variety of ways. The creation of maps builds understandings of how different elements relate to one another and form a whole system or landscape. The idea of mapping is not limited to geographic relationships. Students can create conceptual maps of ecological, social, economic, institutional and cultural relationships in the local area, ways in which the qualities of community life originate from diverse sources within a place, all of which contribute to economic and social viability. Learning about and seeing the relationships matter greatly.

## Curriculums of Place

> *A sense of community is most simply put as an awareness of simultaneous 'belonging' of both society and place.*[31]
>
> *J. Livingstone*

In spite of its range of subject matters, the educational process remains inherently local. Learning is always contextualized on a variety of levels whether these various contexts are acknowledged or not. Many educational institutions traditionally place an emphasis and pride themselves on the creation of a specific "educational environment," testament to the fact that education and environment remain deeply entwined. Pedagogy of place addresses the practical context and understanding of both the schools and subject matter in an enriched environmental context. It broadens the perceptual range of educational environments and grounds them in locale, in the immediate physical and cultural environment in which the school is situated.

With schools identifying, acknowledging and often celebrating the variety of contexts and communities that surround them, discrete curriculums of place can shift from exploring abstract prepackaged contexts to exploring the various communities that constitute the locale and their interrelationships. Students can work from the basic perception of a living and dynamic whole as opposed to the de contextualized and often fragmentary offerings of textbooks.

Developing an educational philosophy that integrates a pedagogy of place has a variety of implications for curriculum that can be divided into three groupings: practical, aesthetic and symbolic. The remainder of this essay will describe and elaborate these fields and their possible significance in relationship to the learner, the school and the common educational project.

### Practical

Practical skills, such as math and science can be developed using the local environment in a methodology called the Smithsonian Square.[32] The Square is a one kilometer by one kilometer area, preferably laid out on or near the school grounds. Once constructed, the Square becomes an ongoing outdoor laboratory for students studying their local environment while developing skills in science and math.

The integration of learning and environment begins in the planning and layout of the square. This work involves surveying, a measurement process utilizing basic trigonometric functions, the same type that are currently being taught in many tenth-grade levels around the country. Surveying to include rise and fall, valleys and hills are practical challenges that place students in a working relationship with their conceptual learning. Construction of simple surveying tools such as a large triangle, a sight, a yardstick and so on, provide a different set of challenges and applications of conceptual and problem solving skills. Use and understanding of a map and compass provides not only mathematical experience but natural science understandings as well. The interpretation and creation of different kinds of maps give students a variety of methods for understanding and experiencing their own locale.

Once the Square is situated, other studies can develop a variety of curriculums based on the Square. Initially, there are species identification tasks and species maps for tree species, shrubs, plants, and vines. The same can be done with animal species and these studies can be extended seasonally to involve the migratory cycles of different species.

Chemists can map and study soil types, essential skills in farming areas. They can also study ground water, airborne pollutants and their interactions with the local area. This can lead to studies of ground water and local industry and/or farming practice.

Students working in hands-on-settings have well-documented benefits to student learning and retention of information.[33] Methodologies, like the Smithsonian Square, offer a common base upon which data can be collected and compared. World wide there is a large organized network of schools involved with Smithsonian Square projects. All are collecting data and observing seasonal and yearly changes in their specific area. This information represents a large relevant data source that is now being tapped for many different areas of scientific research such as atmospheric studies related to global warming/cooling, in the transport and accumulation of atmospheric materials. A variety of these baseline parameters would otherwise never exist if not for student work. This kind of project turns student work into a community asset.

On a more immediate level, Project GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment)[34] and other projects can be connected by the Internet. These can serve as nodes that collect information from the Smithsonian Square and other projects and produce many different materials from them. For instance, if the school is part of the GLOBE network, students enter information on weather conditions and temperature every day. Project GLOBE takes these and by computer generated mapping creates a full weather map for the globe out of the information collected at each site. The same is done in a series of maps that can chart rainfall, temperature gradients, snowfall, and so on. Students can use the information that they contributed to helping track weather systems, the jet stream and even El Niño. Students can see their work applied in the real world of science. The connectivity of this system also creates the ability to do cross site comparisons on a variety of levels. The sharing of scientific information in GLOBE can be the basis for other kinds of sharing where students describe their local world and compare it through not only scientific measures but social studies and anthropologic measures as well.

There are many examples of schools generating positive change by taking responsibility for their local environment through a pedagogy of place. In an Ontario school, students in a history class were studying town development and found that the board of education had filled a small wetland and pond to create a parking lot for the school.[35] Students had the idea to try to restore the wetland to its original form. The environmental restoration is still in progress. From a simple idea, students have gained experience in ecological and environmental restoration, historical research, political process and a myriad of other skills. The town has a newly established wetland and park area that also serves as an ongoing laboratory for following the progress of an ecological restoration. There are many much smaller successes that could be listed from all over North America, many that are becoming centerpieces of work in Rural Challenge sites. The size of any given project is not the point. The notion is that education has not only the possibility to support local environment and local community but perhaps the responsibility to integrate a sense of place and allow that to be part of an educational experience.

The following categories break down the aspects of the pedagogies of place and sense of place curriculums into two different categories and attempt to demonstrate their relevance to issues of learning as well as issues of grounding and support of local culture and landscape.

### Aesthetic

The literature, arts and history of the locale provide significant material and an altogether different educational grounding to a pedagogy of place. Literature studies may include everything from mythic narrative from indigenous cultures, to regional literatures, dialects, folk music, arts, architecture and local history. All these sources can be developed as an expression of the place in which they were constructed or collected. They bear characteristic marks from their geographic sources in their orientation, material, subject matter, dialect and style. These facets, set within an aesthetic focus, ground students not only in place but give a strong sense of the interlocking nature of cultures and their landscapes.

Sense of place has a rich literary tradition stretching back through the millennia. Some of our deepest religious roots and literary traditions are origin myths, many of which derive from the recognition of a sacred land in which to build a society. The common religious theme of a chosen people emerging and searching for a promised land in which to dwell is at the base of the Hebrew/Christian tradition.[36] A similar theme is carried over in the early European settlement of North America. On the North American continent, we have not only the European/Christian traditions and later immigrant traditions of religious and political freedom but an equally vast literature of the indigenous peoples.

In more modern historical times, American literary genres have often been deeply connected to place and have explored the interaction of land and culture. Transcendentalists, most notably Henry David Thoreau, used his local experience with Walden Pond to create an enduring critique of both our modern relationship with our land and our striving for material rather than spiritual wealth.[37] Classic American literature from Mark Twain, Willa Cather, James Baldwin to Leslie Marmon Silko can be developed with an eye towards not only the standard interpretations of literature and history but also with an eye towards regionalism and place.

Along with a push towards higher and higher levels of literacy for students, there is a deepening effort to recognize place and its contribution to both culture and literature in American letters. Writers like Gary Synder, Terry Tempest Williams, Wendell Berry, Deborah Tall and Tony Hiss write, often passionately, about the deep connection between locale, landscape and quality of life. They, with many other historical writers, can demonstrate how to deepen a sense of place through the act of writing and description.

There have also been a number of artistic traditions associated with certain places. One of the most famous historical schools of landscape art grew out of the Hudson River School in New York in the early nineteenth century. The Twentieth Century has seen traditions grow around the Santa Fe school with artists like Georgia O'Keefe. Music and art can also be used as creative entrances into sense of place. There are many traditional forms of dance, music and song which celebrate history and the life on the land. These forms provide historical as well as practical information on how people have imagined their world and created their lives.

**Symbolic**

The symbolic dimension can be seen as a refinement of the aesthetic area but with the key addition of a cultural context. The deeper aspect of a symbolic aspect of place is an entrance into the cultural and ethnic identities that produced the image. The recovery of culture for those who have been disenfranchised, disrupted and/or dislocated provides a powerful grounding for many individuals. The student who is developing an overview of representations of land and place in literature is very different from students recovering or studying their own cultures and looking at the same texts. The symbolic landscape within a deep cultural context is as old as the culture which is telling the stories.

The evolution of the understanding of landscape and the evolution of culture are often intimately connected. There are many examples of this type of understanding in a polyglot culture such as America. The local Middle Eastern restaurant in my town is owned by a Lebanese family which has recently immigrated to America. There are many pictures of Beirut and the Mediterranean covering the walls around the cash register as well as Lebanese music on the stereo. While one could tally these items up to an attempt at authentic ambiance, their placement seems to belie a solely economic interpretation of the phenomena. The links to home and culture are supported by images, music, language and food.

A more scholarly treatment of a landscape and culture can be found in Rick Basso's article entitled "Stalking with Stories."[38] Basso is an anthropologist studying the Apache people in the Southwest United States. Basso discovers that the people use a geographical short hand to describe moral issues. The places which are mentioned, rock pinnacles and formations, are related to mythic events about transgressions and interruptions of the moral order. They live in a moral universe according to Basso, where the landscape constantly reminds them of how to act properly .

Essayists like Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson also connect morality to landscape and life patterns. The subsistence family farm for Berry is not simply a dying economic form but for him is a life-way that produced a grounded ethic and morality that is prescriptive particularly for both child rearing and education in an increasingly mobile and fragmented world. The mountains, the soil and the landscape itself, for Berry, hold both the quality of our dreams and the culture together. Released and disenfranchised from the land, the crucial substrate which nourishes them, both dreams and culture are in decline.[39]

Projects like Foxfire and many other oral history projects implemented around the country have developed the literature and folklore of place by having students collect and gather stories of the life-ways of different times. The Foxfire project has given school age children not only a tangible means of learning history through first person sources (sometimes their own relatives), but also strengthened the communities in which these programs are located by forging a durable link between generations. The other educational spin-offs of this type of work include not only family /community history and continuity of the intergenerational story of a place, but a familiarity with qualitative methodology skills such as interviewing, transcription and coding.

Information in Foxfire projects has been collected and collated into many different articles and numerous presentations. With improving technological access, students have begun work on creating Web pages for the World Wide Web about their projects and producing CD-ROM formats that tell the collected history of a town in Hypertext. This work has spawned an interest in locale and place. It has generated celebrations in music, song, art, story telling and practical arts such as quilt making, log cabin building, broom making, black smithing and a variety of other arts. It has helped sustain traditional values and wisdom by getting young to talk to old.

Native American communities have embraced pedagogy of place as a means to celebrate indigenous culture and local community. Native Alaskan groups have developed a curriculum of place that juxtaposes native traditions with western scientific traditions.[40] Schools gathered a scientist and an elder during the local salmon migration and had each explain the phenomena from their viewpoint. The basis of this presentation and the later conversation grounded not only a biological unit on reproduction but also formed the backbone of the cultural studies unit. The results, rather than being seen as oppositional, provided students a model of the ways in which native and scientific cosmologies overlap.

Within secular American culture, the religious dimension of landscape and land has been widely discussed as a deep and sustaining part of the American character and civilization. The geography of America has transcended in many areas into myth, be it the rocky soils of New England, the mighty Mississippi, the great expanses of the Plains, the formidable Rockies, the Great Salt Lake and on out to the Pacific rim. The deeper aspects of these features can be understood in many ways but the sense and understanding of providence and its function in the lives of our ancestors provides a strong sense of grounding.

## Conclusion

*Hill-tops like hot iron*
*Glitter hot I' in the sun,*
*And the rivers we're eyeing*
*Burn to gold as they run.*
*Burning hot is the ground,*
*Liquid gold in the air;*
*Whoever looks round*
*Sees Eternity there.*[41]

*From Autumn: John Clare*

In the late 1980s news began to flood in with promises of sustained wealth and better opportunity through the globalization of markets and hemispheric pacts. Nevertheless, even as this "good" news spread it bought along with it new findings linking a body of research to the idea of global warming and the discovery of the deteriorating ozone layer that surrounded the earth. These created a curious mixture of economics and environmental concern that became "sustainable development" and "sustainable growth." These were global concerns. The globe was getting smaller, connected by new markets and new technologies. Our understanding of the multiple layers and complexity of our interconnection was growing. Theorists and politicians, using simultaneous referents to local worlds and the global frontiers, evoked mixed metaphors of a "global community" and a "global village." The popular environmental slogan of the 1980s reflected this dual view of a shrinking earth and a rising consciousness of our effects suggesting that we "think globally" and "act locally" to create a better, more sustainable world.

Wendell Berry in his essay "Why I don't think globally"[42] points out that we need only to only act responsibly on a local level and the global issues would abate. Thinking globally to Berry is part of the problem and not part of the solution. Like Berry's thinking, it may seem paradoxical that a pedagogy of place should grow and take root in a educational substrate of global politics and concern flooded with streams of disconnected information. Pedagogy of Place is a local concern. It is based on the idea of good works and civic responsibility. It is economically justifiable and grounded in good pedagogy. More important, perhaps, than any of those measures, is that it attends to the immediate and local. While politicians and educators have focused much attention on the global aspects, they have paid little attention to the village. A pedagogy of place with its intimate integration of land and people may have deeper roots in human nature. The idea has a common sense ring to it and seems to lack the glitter and sparkle of other initiatives. It is true, however, that much of the wisdom of its practice is very old. It is very old magic that can see a universe in a grain of sand.

# Notes

[1] "The genius of place" is a formulation popularized within the Rural Challenge by PACERS (Program for Academic & Cultural Enhancement of Rural Schools) .

[2] Henry David Thoreau, "Huckleberries," *Natural History Essays* (Peregrine Smith, 1986), p. 260.

[3] Donald Oliver's course work and writing on the village as an educational environment inform much of the background of this essay.

[4] Lawrence Cremin,. "Family and Community Linkages in American Education: Some Comments on Recent Historiography," *Families and Communities as Educators*, edited by Hope.J. Leichter (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979), p. 119..

[5] See Hope J. Leichter, "Concepts of Relationship." in *Families and Communities as Educators. See also* Rhoda Metraux, " Resonance in Imagery," *The Study of Culture at a Distance,* (ed.) Margaret Meade, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

[6] Ibid. p.131-133.

[7] A line can be followed from Thomas Jefferson to Horace Mann and on to John Dewey at the beginning of this century which traces the importance of community and its place within progressive traditions and the sustaining of a robust democratic voice. See Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783* ( New York: Harper Row, 1970).

[8] See Donald Oliver, *Education and Community* ( Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1976), Chapters 6-7.

[9] An alliterative expression borrowed from Eleanor Eeles descriptions of education and morality at the turn of the Twentieth Century. See Eleanor Eells, *Eleanor Eells' History of Camping: The first 100 Years* (Martinsville, ID: American Camping Association, 1986), Pp. 56.

[10] Roderick Nash, . (Ed.), "Conservation as Anxiety," *The American Environment: Readings in the History of Conservation. Themes and Social Forces in American History* ( Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1968), p.88-90.

[11] Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism: 1885 -1914 (* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

[12] See David Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* ( New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1967) and Peter Schmitt, *Back to Nature (New York:* Oxford Press, 1985).

[13] See Liberty Hyde Bailey, *Country Life Movement in the United States* (New York: MacMillian, 1913).

[14] See Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and his Legacy* (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 1981).

[15] John Dewey, *The School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990/1900).

[16] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier on American History," *American Historical Association.* Chicago: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1893 and Rodrick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).

[17] See Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1979), Chapter 4-5.

[18] Lucy SpragueMitchell, *The Young Geographers: How They Explore the World and How They will Map the World* (New York: Bank Street College of Education, 1991).

[19] Wendell Berry, W. in William and Wes Jackson (Ed.). *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place* (New Haven, Yale University, 1996).

[20] Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to this Place* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1994), p. 15.

[21] Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children.* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1990),. p. 24.

[22] Ibid.

[23] See Edward Zency, "The Rootless Professors" in William Vitek and Wes Jackson, (Ed.) *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place.*

[24] Dr. Vito Perrone: personal conversation, October, 1996.

[25] On Constructivist pedagogy, see Louis Moll (Ed.) *Vygostsky and Education: Instructional Implications and Applications of Sociohistorical Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Eleanor Duckworth, *Having Wonderful Ideas and Other Essays on Teaching and Learning* (Teachers College Press, 1987)

[26] David Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1992).

[27] Ibid. p.131.

[28] Ian Frazer, "Carving Your Name on the Rock" in William Zinsser, (Ed.) "They Went: The Art and Craft of Travel Writing." in *The Writer's Craft* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991) p. 40.

[29] Eric Dardel, quoted in Deborah Tall, *From Where We Stand.* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press. Tall, 1993), p. .98.

[30] Illustration adopted from Tim Ingold, "Globes and Spheres," Kay Milton, (Ed.) (1993). *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology,* ASA Monographs. (New York, NY, Routledge, 1993).

[31] John A. Livingstone, "Other Selves," William Vitek, (Ed.) *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place*, p. 132.

[32] Developed by Smithsonian Institute and National Science Foundation.

[33] See Emily Cousins and Melissa Rodgers (Ed.) *Fieldwork: An Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Reader.* Vol. II. (Dubuque, Iowa; Kendall and Hunt, 1995).

[34] Project GLOBE can be accessed via the Internet at http:// www.globe.gov.

[35] Personal Communication, Dr. Joseph Sheridan, York University, August 1996.

[36] See Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press) and "'Placed' between Promise and Command," William Vitek, (Ed.) (1996). *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place.*

[37] Though Thoreau's most famous work is certainly *Walden* in regard to pedagogy of place, many of his other shorter essays such as "Huckleberries" deal directly with not only place but education.

[38] Daniel Halpern, "On Nature: Nature, Landscape, and Natural History" (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), p. 315.

[39] The champion of the family farm, Berry focuses on the survival of the farm as a theme in many different volumes among them; Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture.* (New York: Avon Books, 1977) and essays in Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (Berkeley: North Point Press, 1983).

[40] See A. Oscar Kawagley, *A Yupiaq World view: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit* (Prospect Heights, Ill, Waveland Press, Inc., 1995) and Roy Barnhardt, "Higher Education in the Fourth World: Indigenous People Take Control." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 18(#2): 199-230.

[41] Robert Bly, (Ed.) *News of the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness* (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1980), p.57.

[42] Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1983).

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# REFLECTIONS ON LEONARD COVELLO:

## Teacher with a Heart

**Vito Perrone**

*The excerpts which follow come from a larger text on my reflections on Leonard Covello who come to East Harlem (New York City) from Avigliano, Italy in 1896, graduated from Columbia University in 1911 and for the next 45 years was a teacher and principal in East Harlem. What stands out in his remarkable career as an educator is his commitment to his East Harlem community and his understanding that the school and the community needed a reciprocal relationship.*

*Covello's story is very urban, but his work has close connections to what the Rural Challenge is offering for rural schools and communities. It seemed that Covello's work, and my reflections, might be useful to schools and communities associated with the Rural Challenge, offering yet more possibilities.*

*The account below is not a connected narrative. I have taken segments from many different places in the text. The ellipses (...) denote a break in the narrative. Also, page references without other author information indicate content which comes directly from Covello's autobiography, The Heart is the Teacher.*

What Covello learned when he left school to become a full time worker [he left school in his junior year] was that the compensation was not great enough to make a substantial difference in family circumstances. Moreover, he was not particularly happy and he stayed mostly at home when not working, burying himself in books. Mary Accurso, at this time in college, convinced Covello that he should go back to school, that conditions might not be good for his family but the family would survive as it had been surviving. His parents offered no rejoinder to his decision to return to school as they had given no protest about his decision to leave school. Southern Italian immigrant children often had to make their own decisions about such things. In saying this, I am immediately brought back to my teaching experience in a school setting, hearing many of my teacher colleagues speak about how irresponsible so many of their students were. Yet many of these students, like Covello, were regularly making major decisions about their lives, often without much adult support. We need to make connections to that particular

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level of genuine responsibility.

Were there benefits from his year of fulltime work? Covello says that being out in the work world meant meeting many different people from many different nationalities. He began to think differently about the Irish, the Poles, the Jews. "I found out," he says, "that New York did not consist of merely Americans and Italians, but rather of people in varying stages of the thing called Americanization....I began to find myself reacting differently toward the bustling humanity around me" (p.56).

Work was for Covello an important means of crossing boundaries, of moving beyond the isolation of Avigliano and his East Harlem neighborhood. How, today, do we help students get beyond the boundaries that exist for them? We speak of the immigrant ghettos of Covello's growing up period as if such insular islands no longer exist. Housing patterns, dictated to a large degree by social attitudes and economic status, still leave most people in ghettoized situations. Those who live in the middle and upper class suburban communities of America see few people different from themselves. They don't see much of the growing population of color in the United States. While they have larger horizons than their poorer neighbors in America's central cities, they still travel fairly circumscribed routes. And African-Americans, Southeast Asians and Hispanics live out much of their lives in relatively familiar settings. Students in many of our urban communities seldom go outside of narrowly drawn geographical boundaries in which most people look like them and dress like them.

We need to find ways of supporting students to move beyond their physical and cultural boundaries, to meet, work with, get to know others better. Work often makes this more possible. Can work become more connected to the schools? more integral to the curriculum? We now have increasing numbers of schools, mostly in urban settings, developing school-to-work/to career/to post-secondary education programs. They should be broader, involve more students, be related to richer and more diverse work/career settings. Some of what Covello found outside of school regarding learning about others could be more connected to school.

A particular concern of many contemporary secondary schools remains students who work while in school. One difference is that work doesn't necessarily lead students out of school permanently—as was often the case in earlier times. As it is, close to 70 percent of secondary school students are employed, working on average from 15-18 hours per week, principally in the burgeoning fast-food and service industries. Rather than viewing this work as positive, contributing to student responsibility and a sense of usefulness, however, those in schools speak of it primarily as lessening student commitments to the school's academic and extracurricular programs and fostering what they believe to be an unhealthy materialism. Once again it is as if the work of the school and the larger world must be in conflict, that there aren't connecting points of consequence that actually affect the students and their learning.

While I acknowledge that students who work over twenty hours a week (and this encompasses almost half of student workers) tend to suffer academically within the current structure of schools (time bound, restrictive in terms of the number of courses a student must take each semester, and curricularly insular), the work of students needs to be thought about more constructively (as does the structure of schools). Students, for example, speak of what they do in their work as "being useful," "creating a sense of independence" and "responsibility." They also tend to enjoy their work. And employers see them as reliable and competent. Are such perspectives to be negated? Is there no way to use such awareness?

I often ask teachers why they don't have students maintain journals of their work experience; why they don't make these work experiences the focus of study in courses in health, nutrition, science, economics, mathematics, government, history and literature; why they don't engage more directly the materialist culture that is so potent in American society and contributes heavily to student employment. Can't the world these students have entered into so fully be connected to the ongoing and important work of the schools?

A number of schools have actually sought means of constructing more productive school-work connections. In some cases, this has been done through worksite internships or apprenticeships. Students in the Children's Hospital collaborative, one of the worksite programs of the Fenway School in Boston, carry out as part of their work a research project under the supervision of a hospital staff person that is the primary science-related project required by the school. Students in the Elementary School Teaching Program associated with the Cambridge Rindge & Latin School write children's books as part of their English requirement. At Central Park East, students must complete an internship/work requirement for graduation that includes a reflective paper placing the work in historical/cultural context. And in several of the schools associated with the Annenberg Rural Challenge, teachers and students are actively engaged together in entrepreneurial enterprises in their communities. Creating businesses, run by students, has become a well integrated element of the academic program. The rationale in these settings for encouraging entrepreneurial activities is that students need to learn how to create work so they can live where they wish to live. These are certainly beginning efforts - - road maps to an even larger set of possibilities.

More confident, more comfortable with students from other backgrounds after a year out of school, Covello became, when he returned, more involved in school activities and more engaged with the academic course work. He also got more engaged by matters of social injustice, something he thought about a good deal while outside of school. He notes, though, being cautioned not to speak or write about such things. He wondered why "the oppression of people" wasn't a topic for the school—whether the peasants in Russia being cruelly treated by the Czarist government or "immigrants and negroes" in the United States who faced injustice everyday. How much has changed? Is the school a major venue for examining intensively critical social issues?

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Why is it so hard in our schools to actually examine the conditions that exist for our students and their families? for those who are described as different? One of the most important contemporary stories in Boston's history relates to the court ordered desegregation of the schools. In many schools, teachers are admonished not to discuss it, not to present the Eyes on the Prize account of the violence. Race plays a particularly large role in the life of Boston. Not to make this a matter of examination seems unhealthy. Yet it goes, for the most part, unexamined.

We have a curious educational history in regard to what are considered "controversial issues." In some respects, almost everything that exists in the world has aspects that could be seen as controversial. Do we want our students to ask why hunger exists in the world? Or why there are homeless people in the streets? Or why African-

Americans face such harsh discrimination? Or why there is such disparity of wealth in the United States? Or why so much money is spent on space exploration? Or why the atom bomb was actually used on a civilian population? Or how our cities can be more livable? Or how universal health care can be assured? Or how we can preserve more effectively the environment? Or what the possibilities and problems are in relation to genetic engineering? Or what the problems are with the various books that people want to censor in some form? Or what the abortion struggle is about? Or why the school restricts students' rights to expression or assembly? Or why our schools are so poorly equipped and maintained? Shouldn't school classrooms be venues for conversation about the world, places where students learn to engage critical issues thoughtfully, weighing carefully the evidence, coming to understand alternative perspectives? In relation to the foregoing, it is a delight to be in The Urban Academy, a small public school in New York City, where everything studied is presented through alternative views, a range of questions and interpretations. One interesting recent course was titled, "Don't Read That Book: Censorship in America." Another was "Who Freed the Slaves?" As one student shared with me, "I have learned to separate a person's ideas and beliefs from the person. I can now disagree with a person's ideas without feeling I must also physically attack or ridicule the person." That is an important lesson. Is there any better place than a school for that kind of learning?

In settings in which the world is permitted to enter the classroom, where students are encouraged to ask about the connections between what they study and what they read in the newspapers, see on television and observe in the streets, what is often called controversial is just ongoing inquiry. This is a healthier place for teachers and students to stand.

Covello thought it was important to live in the community, close to his students. This, he noted, made it possible for him to see his students and their families in the streets. He conveys in his autobiography and various speeches how often he had important conversations with students and their parents outside of school, in their more natural environment. He clearly valued these exchanges. It meant, as he saw it , that he could visit the homes of his students more easily. And he was, as students recalled, a frequent visitor in their homes. It meant, as well, that community issues affecting his students were also his issues, affecting him personally as well as professionally.

Covello thought it was natural, for example, to make housing a major issue for the Benjamin Franklin Community School to assume leadership around, because it mattered to his students and their families—as well as to him. In addition, he personally got involved, as a teacher, in organizing neighborhood libraries in the East Harlem community—because he lived there and could speak easily to his students, parents and community members about the importance of such libraries and their collective need to help staff them. Moreover, that East Harlem should have better medical facilities was clear to Covello, another issue for the school to consider critical because he lived in East Harlem and knew a good deal about community needs. Making medical care a school-wide issue also seemed natural to Covello as he came to believe that the schools' curriculum needed to be connected to community concerns. He understood well the meaning of "a pedagogy of place."

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In our schools today, teachers are looking out increasingly at students of many racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In many respects, our schools have never been as universal nor our population so varied. While Covello was not faced by as much diversity as currently exists, the issues were, nonetheless, not so different. Race, language and cultural matters, alongside severe problems of housing, healthcare and discrimination certainly dominated life in and around Covello's schools.

The discourse of multiculturalism is large at the present time but it gets played out mostly in the form of supplementary literature or by regularly scheduled days, weeks, or months devoted to a particular racial, ethnic or cultural group. This is clearly an advancement, but it remains only a marginal response. What I have found most prevalent in the schools around race and cultural matters, however, is silence. Can we really believe that the barriers that now exist, that keep us from achieving the democratic ideals, the social justice, the economic progress that we hold out in our public discourse, will ever fall away without confronting more directly matters of race in the schools and in the society? How many more generations of silence can we endure? As it is, inquiries into matters of race in schools, colleges and universities are awkward, guilt-ridden, sometimes hostile, but mostly absent. Where beyond schools and college classrooms are young people to learn to discuss matters of race with intelligence and sensitivity? How else but through active consideration of race will teachers and administrators in schools assume a higher level of awareness and take more seriously the effects of inequitable educational opportunity? I continue in this regard to be surprised by the denial of differential education for students of color—overplacement in special education and in lower level courses, higher levels of suspension, lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates. When will such problems matter enough to actually do something about them? They don't exist by chance.

Covello was unusually sensitive to racial and cultural differences. He had heard enough "wop" and "dagos" to know that "kike", "nigger" and "spick" were closely related, that any effort to diminish another person was in itself diminishing. Race and culture were subjects to talk about, not hide.

One of the committees formed at the Benjamin Franklin Community School was The Racial Committee. It had as a central purpose changing attitudes by constructing within the school more inter-cultural curriculum, assuring integrated clubs, committees and social events and encouraging in the community larger forums for discussion about issues relating to ethnicity and race.

By 1938, the school's curriculum, in every subject field, had intercultural content. It was a matter of genuine conversation in department meetings and in classrooms. Teachers assumed responsibility for learning more about their students and their cultural backgrounds. We are not doing better today. In fact, we may be doing worse.

Major conferences on racial and ethnic group relations were organized at the school. Two which received considerable public notice were the "Greater New York Conference on Racial and Cultural Relations in the United States" (in 1942) and "The Conference on Racial Conflict" (in 1943). Conference sponsors, beyond the Benjamin Franklin Racial Committee were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The American Jewish Council, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the National Urban League and the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (Peebles, p.272).

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, currently New York's senior Senator, provided as a high school student a set of resolutions to the 1942 Conference on Race and Cultural Relations on behalf of the Benjamin Franklin Racial Committee. They were as follows: an end to racial segregation in the armed forces; the merging of Negro and White blood banks by the Red Cross; an increase in teachers representing various racial and cultural groups; and the appointment of a Director of Inter-cultural Education to support teachers in New York schools to promote inter group understanding (Peebles, p.273). From a distance, it is hard not to be impressed by the fact that such issues were common enough to be discussed in the school setting and formulated as resolutions for debate. How many schools today are ready to examine racial attitudes in their schools and communities? or consider ways of assuring that teachers are more representative of local populations? or call for an end to discriminatory employment practices against certain racial or ethnic groups? or seek evidence about whether there is differential treatment of people in the criminal justice system or the health care systems? Most of us could add to this set of questions.

Covello noted of these large conferences, and other similar forums held in the East Harlem community:

> *In recent years, there has been a tendency to isolate youth in 'youth movements' and 'youth groups.' For some purposes, this is an excellent idea; but, in working out major problems in community life, both young people and old people should have a share. Both will learn much from the school, which assumes the leadership; and each will learn from the other. Covello Papers-Peebles, p.274*

. . . . . . .

What does it mean for teachers to work together? Can some unified work be pursued? Covello made clear that "we had to prepare our students for the very serious business of living and sharing in the responsibilities of society" (p.205). As he saw it, everyone in the school had to pull together around such a purpose.

I cite the following account from the early work at the Benjamin Franklin Community School as an example of joint work.

> *In the English Department, Austin Works channeled literature in the direction of books that gave the pupil a realistic picture of the world he lived in, as well as what was expected of him in return. Along with Shakespeare and Milton and Scott, the student was given writers such as Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell, who dealt with contemporary social problems.*
>
> *Social-study classes stressed the theme 'Know Your Community!'*
>
> *The Art Department worked out a huge map of East Harlem, carefully outlining individual blocks. From this original which hung in my office, duplicates of a smaller size were printed and distributed to the various departments of the school and civic organizations of the neighborhood, to be used for their own purposes.*
>
> *Slowly, on the master map, we began to accumulate information which, in turn, was fed out to the smaller maps. Before anything else, we wanted to know where our students lived. In varying colors to indicate nationality, we spotted them on the map. and were astonished to find distributions and concentrations of population never before realized. As part of their social-studies experience, the boys took to the streets after hours with pencil and paper to gather statistical information*

> *about their neighborhood which the Art Department, in terms of symbols, transferred to the master map.*
>
> *The map showed that in East Harlem there were forty-one churches and missions, twenty-two political clubs, nine labor organizations, five hundred and six candy stores, two hundred sixty-two barber shops. There were twenty-eight liquor stores, one hundred fifty-six bars, twenty-six junk shops, six hundred eighty-five grocers, three hundred seventy-eight restaurants, two hundred thirty-two tailors, and sixty-three radio repair shops, as well as two hundred ninety-seven doctors, seventy-four dentists, one hundred and two furniture stores, and fourteen loan offices. Hungrily our map devoured these statistics. With all the different markers in it, it began to look like a pin cushion.*
>
> *While many of the things we discovered we already knew, it was both significant and depressing, both to students and to us teachers, to realize that a community which could support forty-one religious institutions and twenty-two political clubs could boast only a few open playgrounds for its children, three public halls, no neighborhood newspaper at all...*
>
> *At this time we had already started our campaign for a housing project in East Harlem and a new building for our school. But the leg work of our students showed that it was one thing to talk about modern housing projects such as those being launched in other parts of the city but another to overcome the many problems involved. The idea of compact units with thousands of families living in comfortable apartments, each with independent toilet and bath, was wonderful to contemplate and fight for. But what would happen to the dozens of little merchants in each block who would be dispossessed? Was no one to consider the five hundred and six candy store owners, the six hundred eighty-five grocers, the two hundred sixty-two barbers, most of whom had never known a home outside of East Harlem? Where would they go when the wrecking crews came in to wipe out six square blocks to make way for the new housing project?...We had to learn before we achieved the millennium*
> *(pp.205-206).*

It is impressive, to me, that students learned so much about their local setting—that it served as a base for so much of their subject matter learning. In the homogenization of our schools, what is most local is not critically examined—only serving to confirm the disconnectedness of the schools.

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The connection of the school to the world came through in other ways at the Benjamin Franklin Community School. Covello noted:

> *Take the world of art, for instance. In too many city schools...the artwork produced by students used to depict a woodland scene, a landscape, or a seascape. Art, like poetry, was treated as something apart from the reality of daily living. We tried to get away from this at Franklin. There, art study tied in closely with our concern with the community. What many of the boys produced, as an expression of themselves, reflected their thoughts and ideas about the daily business of living in East Harlem.*

> *Instead of a waterfall with a mill, a painting would show a mud-colored brick tenement with ugly fire escapes and laundry hanging on the roof; but on the front stoop, men in shirt sleeves caught a moment of sunlight. Instead of the surf and rock-bound coast of Maine, a charcoal sketch showed a dock on the East River and tugboats and kids swimming. It was vital art, and alive. In the midst of squalor it spoke the yearning for a better life. The walls of our building were not decorated with reproductions of old masterpieces. We hung the best work of our students. It made them proud and gave them an incentive to do better... (p.216-217).*

Other examples grew from projects that related to community problems.

> *Each student was required to select a problem and follow it through. The group studying the problems of the slums was expected to make a personal investigation of actual slum conditions. The group studying problems of the "melting pot" had to ascertain through actual observation and personal investigation the difficulties presented in the adjustment of racial differences and animosities.*
>
> *Each student had to turn in a midterm theme and a final term theme showing his personal reaction to the problem studied. These individual themes were something personal—essays, possibly stories, even verse, showing by the student's reactions to external stimuli what went on deep inside of him.*
>
> *I have still in my possession one such theme given to me as a gift. It is a story in photographs done by a student named Hans Geissler. I remember him as a shy, blond lad always coming to class with a camera dangling from his shoulder. The photographs, bound into a book, show on the cover a Negro and a white man seated together in front of a fire made out of a few pieces of cardboard, trying to warm themselves, while the wretchedness of the slums spreads all around them...*
>
> *About the cover illustration itself he reported, 'These two men earn their bare living by selling paper cartons which they pick up from refuse thrown out by grocery stores. It was a cold Sunday morning when this photograph was taken. The dying fire may well illustrate their dying souls, but do not let it be thought that they have given up hope or ambition. What little work they have to do, they do well.....'*
>
> *The last photograph is a close-up—a portrait of a man's head. The mouth is firm, hard. The eyes sullen. The brow furrowed, as if the brain reaches for a balance between fury and despair. 'The forgotten man—the refuse of the depression,' wrote Hans. 'His problems are our problems, because if we do not help him solve his, ours will never be solved.' (pp.217-218).*

Teachers at Benjamin Franklin understood that students made larger commitments to topics they selected themselves, worked at over time, brought to a finished point. This meant a curriculum that was not overly prescriptive, that helped students learn what they needed to know in order to do what they wanted to do. Further, time was provided for students to do good work and to share their learning with others. As it is, students often don't complete much work in school that they truly honor.

In recounting student projects — that came from students' own passions, that meant something important to them— Covello was also making a statement about educational standards. He understood what many thoughtful teachers have also long understood, that students already possess standards as well as work toward new standards. That some students successfully researched land values in East Harlem and presented their work authoritatively meant such work was possible and it was possible for others. Doing primary research on community issues became more and more commonplace. When the first student presented a documentary history with photographs as a base, such documentary histories became more common. The first literary review brought other literary reviews. The first set of biographies of East Harlem residents stimulated other biographies. High quality work made visible, shared with other students and members of the community, was a catalyst at Benjamin Franklin for ever higher quality work.

This dynamic character of standards (Carini, 1994) needs to be made more central to current thought in schools. As it is, standards are being established externally and mostly in static language. They are not likely to encourage among students or teachers their best work.

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Under Covello's watch, students always played responsible roles. While he accounts in his autobiography for many such examples, one stands out for me. The occasion was a presentation by Fiorello LaGuardia, then President of the Board of Aldermen of New York, a popular Italian politician, well known in the East Harlem community. Vito Marcantonio, representing "Il Circolo Italiano," was to offer a student speech and then introduce LaGuardia. Covello recounts:

> *It would be difficult for anyone to forget the startled faces of the students gathered at assembly that day when Marc stepped forward on the speaker's platform and said, 'This morning I am going to talk about old-age pensions and social security...'*
>
> *In a few moments, there was complete silence in the auditorium as Marc's impassioned voice pressed the argument for providing for the old age of people who with their labor had helped to build America but who had never been able to earn more than enough to feed their children and pay for the clothes on their backs. He spoke passionately, eloquently—and, I know, sincerely. '...for, if it is true that government is of the people and for the people, then it is the duty of government to provide for those who, through no fault of their own, have been unable to provide for themselves. It is the social responsibility of every citizen to see that these laws for our older people are enacted.'*
>
> *The applause which followed as Marc backed away from the lectern convinced me more than ever that adolescents are far more capable of serious thought and understanding than they are given credit for being...*
>
> *LaGuardia shook Marc's hand, slapped him on the shoulder in a congratulatory gesture. Then, in his own inimitable way, he thrust out his chin and picked up the thread of Marc's speech and used it as the basis for his own talk. "Our neglected citizens...." His audience howled.*
>
> *Assembly that day was a huge success... Most important of all, for LaGuardia and Marcantonio it was the beginning of an association and friendship which was to endure for many years. Almost as soon as he had finished law school, Marc*

> *went to work in LaGuardia's congressional campaigns in East Harlem. When LaGuardia was elected Mayor of New York in 1933, Marc was elected to replace him in Congress (pp.53-54).*

We don't typically help our students assume responsible roles in our schools, gaining the kinds of experiences that enable them to be actively involved in their communities. We certainly don't commonly ask them to consider contemporary dilemmas and, after careful research, offer possible solutions.

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Covello brought large numbers of students—first at DeWitt Clinton and then at Benjamin Franklin—into the community, believing that an education that included active service was essential. Service has rebounded in contemporary schools, but in most settings it is carefully measured, aimed more at the student and his or her growth than at the rel[illegible]ocal communities and their well being. In the best of situations, service activities would have a more reciprocal quality.

Large numbers of Covello's students were involved in citizenship education work, many at La Casa del Popolo (the people's house) which was devoted to immigrant families. Covello was actively involved in programs there before he got students involved. Recognizing that there were not enough teachers to meet the demand for citizenship education, Covello turned the problem over to the students, suggesting that:

> *We can't expect much help from the outside. After all, these are our own people. If we don't help them, who will? Are we going to allow them to be robbed of their rights as Americans simply because we are too indifferent to teach them English and train them to pass the citizenship tests? (p.155)*

Being challenged by Covello to do real work in the community, large numbers of students volunteered. As Covello notes, the students "turned out to be vigorous teachers" (p.156) who brought large numbers of adults through the entire naturalization process. This was yet another venue for involving students in active citizenship, providing students a larger measure of responsibility, self-efficacy, an important place in an intergenerational world. It seems that our schools today are more rigidly age-segregated than ever before. We have children engaged mostly with children their own ages. That we have what many call "a youth culture problem" is one result.

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In the 60s, many schools, as part of their commitments to the civil rights revolution, got students involved in voter registration drives. Like Covello's activities around citizenship training, this was genuine service. And in many communities, students are involved in building projects related to senior citizens or to Habitat for Humanity. These, too, represent genuine service work. In settings in which community needs are a focus of study, service activities assume this more salutary quality.

……

Two other service oriented, academically related projects that Covello made much of in his autobiography and other writings related to the work of the Playlot and Health Committees. The Playlot Committee, responding to community concerns about playspaces for young children, cleaned up several rubble filled lots for conversion into playgrounds. Working with large numbers of school and community volunteers and a host of city agencies, the members of the Playlot Committee opened their first playground in 1937 — the Franklin Playlot. The opening ceremony generated considerable enthusiasm. Covello writes of this effort:

> *We had achieved what we felt should be one of the basic aims of education — improvement of community life, not merely through discussion but through a demonstration of school-community action. It is true that recreational problems are city problems and the responsibility for their solution rests to a great extent with city agencies. But the citizens must assume the final responsibility and the ability to assume the responsibility must be inculcated in the growing child (p.254).*

One of the projects of the Health Committee related to sanitary conditions in East Harlem, something the newspapers often commented on. Along with educational activities, the Committee also promoted block efforts to clean up neighborhoods, giving prizes to those blocks that had done the most. Importantly, the Committee also organized petition drives to gain higher quality city services, arguing that the city did not address sufficiently the needs of poorer communities. In regard to this sanitation work, Covello acknowledged that it was hard to know how much good all the work did but he believed, nonetheless, that such efforts to make the community better provided an important educational experience equal to anything else that might have been offered.

Feeling confident about students taking part in authentic community tasks where they would have to be responsible persons seemed natural for Covello. Currently, children and young people tend to describe their school learning as having very little to do with their lives beyond school. When students speak of the "remoteness " of school, and they do, they are really talking about the lack of connection between school and the world outside. They are essentially acknowledging what Alfred North Whitehead noted—that most of what is taught in school is not about life "as it is known in the midst of living it."

Students see, for example, homelessness and poverty in the streets around them, they know about immigration as they hear so many languages being spoken, they are aware of racial discord, community violence, drugs, war, famine and environmental degradation. That schools do not explore such issues deeply, for the most part even ignoring them, reinforces for students that the schools are about something other than the realities of the world. This is unfortunate.

Further, the content of schools seldom relates to what people in a particular community are worried about or care deeply about. For example, the schools do not often make the historical and cultural roots or the economic and political structures of their local communities a focus of study. A community's storytellers, craftpersons, builders, day care and health providers are not common visitors. The literature that is read has generally not been selected because it helps them assume a larger sense of responsibility for some aspect of the social good or makes it possible for them to engage a non-school mentor more productively or assist a person in need. This disconnectedness trivializes much of what students are asked to learn.

We know all of this intuitively. While this knowledge causes many in schools to make occasional forays into the community—a walk to the park in relation to a science project, going to the local library so every student will get a library card, inviting in a couple of persons each year to share some aspect of their experience, having a cultural awareness day related to the special ethnic origins of a dominant community group, having students go sporadically to a senior citizen center or read to children in a lower grade level—such efforts tend to be viewed as special events surrounding the real work of the school. This is the case even as teachers and their students often view these efforts as the highlights of the school year.

……

I believe we owe it to our young people to assure that they are deeply involved with their communities, that they leave the schools eager to take an active part in the political and cultural systems that surround them. Enlarging our vision of the school is, therefore, important. Covello understood this extremely well. He provides us many examples of how to proceed.

……

John Dewey spoke of schools as centers for democratic education, having as a central purpose the formation of a democratic society. Covello understood this more fully than most American educators. He saw the Benjamin Franklin Community School as the epitome of Dewey's democratic conception, constructed around the view that community well being was an essential purpose. He wrote, in relation to this tie between schools and their surrounding communities (which, at the time, as is the case today in many of our urban settings, were filled with immigrant families, living through a myriad of cultural conflicts) that the schools "occupied a unique position..." (Covello, 1936).

> *It is the only social agency that has direct contact with practically every family within the community and the education law makes this contact with the family compulsory from the early childhood to the late adolescence of every boy and girl. This is important when one realizes that the public-school system functions in a city which has a population of close to seven million people, of whom one million two hundred thousand go to school... To accomplish [its mission on behalf of immigrants] it is necessary first to allay the distrust and the antagonism that have risen out of misunderstanding and indifference. Disruptive forces must be replaced with a spirit of friendliness and intelligent cooperation in the building of wholesome social and civic relationships. Leonard Covello, "A High School and Its Immigrant Community: A Challenge and an Opportunity," Journal of Educational Sociology, vol. 9 (Feb. 1936), p.1, 340.*

To say that the schools should be community centers does not mean that they were fulfilling such roles. He noted in this regard:

> *Has the school really felt the life of the community pulsating beyond its four walls? Has it made an attempt to realize the problems and difficulties with which the immigrant neighborhood is faced? Has it answered the community call for help and its need and longing for guidance? To what extent has the school penetrated into the community, analyzing, encouraging, and developing its latent educational forces, and helping to counteract the forces of disorganization that apparently even the highly organized society of today seems unable to curb even in the better*

*ordered communities? ("A High School and Its Immigrant Community" in Public, p. 219)*

How did Covello describe the aims of the Benjamin Franklin Community School? What did he believe should be the aims of all schools? I outline below several of his definitions:

- *The community-centered school is a school that reaches out into the community in order to make available to the community all of the resources of education.*

- *It implies an educational program based upon the principles of democracy in that it seeks to draw the community into conference with the school in order to determine the needs of individual students, the needs of the community as a whole, and the needs of the school, in relation to the community.*

- *The community-centered school endeavors to prepare its students for intelligent leadership and intelligent participation in community and national life by providing opportunities for leadership and participation while the student is yet in school.*

- *The community-centered school accepts responsibility for the social well-being of the community, as well as for the educational training of students committed to the care of the school.*

- *In carrying forward its program, the community-centered school can function successfully only if it be willing to become the friend and neighbor, as well as educational leader of the community. There must be understanding and cooperation between the school and the community before either can carry out its full responsibility in relation to the youth of the community.*

- *The program of the community-centered school, therefore, must be all-inclusive; it must be as broad as itself; it must be rooted in the human needs, the human aspirations, and the human capabilities of the individuals that comprise the community. (From Covello, "A High School and Its Immigrant Community," Journal of Educational Sociology, vol. IX, No. 6 (Feb. 1931) pp. 345-346.*

This Community School conception is certainly rooted in democratic principles. Why is it so difficult to put such principles into practice? Our continuing task is to link communities and schools, to see them as integrally related, mutually dependent on one another.

......

The Community Advisory Council was the vehicle for coordinating the work of Benjamin Franklin as a community school. Covello wrote about its virtues as follows:

*Our whole Community Advisory Council approach is predicated on the thesis that there should be a greater correlation between the neighborhood social agencies and the school.. Our teachers should know more about the educational work of*

> *the settlement houses and the settlement houses should know more about the social progress of the schools. (from Covello Papers-Community Advisory Council File, in Peebles, p. 215).*

A student participant in the Community Advisory Council wrote his own statement.

> *There was a time when the school was merely a place in which certain subjects were taught to children and that was all. That time is, I believe, past. The school is now the center of the community. From its position there radiate many channels of neighborhood activity. This activity, as carried on in Benjamin Franklin High School, is absolutely necessary. Especially is it necessary in a large city like New York, which contains so many communities, each with its own problems.*
>
> *We... are striving to establish our school as a place where all may get together and discuss the problems peculiar to our own district. In order to do this, leaders in the community and institutions such as library heads, hospitals, social workers, welfare organizations and political leaders are asked to join our various community advisory groups. In such groups the student should certainly not be forgotten. He is often more acutely aware of neighborhood problems than are his elders... The school might very well be a meeting ground where parent and child could get together. Very often the parent does not understand English which is all the more reason for the schools taking a hand. In Franklin we haven't a 'Parent-Teachers Association', but a 'Parent, Teachers and Friends' organization. Now among these friends might very well be included the parents' children. We shouldn't have open school 'week' but rather - open school year. This will come about naturally as the school interests itself in community affairs. (Covello Papers, in Peebles, p. 215-216).*

The struggle for low-cost housing in East Harlem was led by a student-community committee associated with the Benjamin Franklin School. As was the case with virtually every community issue undertaken, study, research, and community education and participation were embedded activities.

The housing drive began with research on various existing conceptions of urban housing, followed by model building and drawings (rooted in the research and developed within existing areas of East Harlem) along with original models developed by students. These formed a large exhibition to educate the community.

At the same time, speculators were trying to buy up East River frontage for expensive apartment complexes. Covello notes:

> *To permit this would have been an injustice to the people of the community....we organized more meetings, held parades through the streets of East Harlem, distributed leaflets asking for the help of every man, woman and child in our efforts to obtain better housing for our people. We circulated hundreds of petitions addressed to the Mayor and the NY City Housing Authority... (p.219-229).*

As it turned out, the community won a great victory, and engaged in a large community celebration, as funds were approved for low rent housing adjacent to East

River Drive. It became a model for additional efforts to acquire more housing for the community.

......

Getting a new high school building had many of the qualities of the work on housing. The larger struggle, in the end, revolved around the site. The students settled on the East River Drive site.

> *'Why shouldn't we have the most beautiful location for our school?' everyone asked.*
>
> *The answer was that this site would probably cost more than any of the others. The students took matters into their own hands. Shortly after this, at a radio panel discussion, they had a chance to discuss this same question of site with Mayor LaGuardia. 'The East River location is much more expensive,' he said. 'I'm afraid we'll have to settle for one of the others.'*
>
> *The spokesman for the student committee got up. 'Mr. Mayor,' he said, 'our social-studies teachers arranged for us to make a study of land values. We checked the record and we found that according to the assessed valuation, the East River Drive site would actually cost less than any of the others.'*
>
> *Mayor LaGuardia seemed flustered for a moment. Then with the humor and poise characteristic of him, he said, 'We'll discuss it after the program, boys.'*
>
> *In fact, after the radio program, the Mayor had quite a talk with the students... 'If you're right,' he said, wagging a pudgy finger, 'and I believe you are, I will do everything possible to make this the site for the new school.' (p.228)*

The school was opened in April 1942. Covello notes of the dedication ceremony:

> *War colored the entire ceremony that day. Mayor LaGuardia reminded the boys that whether or not the war ended before they could serve in it, they would face another war against dislocated conditions and that they had to bring themselves to realize the enormity of their responsibilities and prepare for them.*
>
> *As I stood up on the platform of our magnificent auditorium, capable of seating thirteen hundred people, facing my students, my friends and neighbors of East Harlem, I could hardly speak. 'To those of us who have lived and worked in this community for many years,' I said, 'this occasion marks the fulfillment of a long cherished dream-the dream of transforming dirt and ugliness into spaciousness and beauty, of bringing light into darkness....'*
>
> *In speaking about the program of the school, I added, 'Fulfilling the ideal of Community Service to which it has been dedicated, the Benjamin Franklin High School will now operate on a round-the-clock program of use by all community organizations. Believing that a school building should be available to all the members of the community, all the time, the Board of Education has conferred a signal honor on Benjamin Franklin High School.*
>
> *By a special vote it has decreed that our building is to be open every hour of every day of the year. This means that we who live and work in East Harlem are free to use its magnificent resources at all times.' (p.230).*

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